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Synchronicity of the Community College Mission and the Role and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors

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SYNCHRONICITY OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE MISSION AND THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS

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ABSTRACT

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Chair: Dr. Scipio A.J. Colin, III

The purposes of this study were to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges; to explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors; and to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice.

There is a strong link between the community college mission and the job functions performed by academic advisors; however, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about how academic advisors can play a vital role in achieving the goals established by the community college mission and how academic advising can facilitate student success.

Due to the nature of the research problem, purpose of the study, questions guiding the study, and the desired end product, a qualitative research paradigm, designed within the interpretive case study methodology was selected. The three qualitative methods of data collection used in the study were interviews,

focus groups, and document analysis. All of the participants in this study were from community colleges in Illinois. Participants of the study included eight professional academic advisors, and two community college administrators.

Two research questions were developed to guide the direction of the study: How do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission and how do community college administrators, who supervise academic advisors, perceive academic advising relative to the institution's mission? The findings provide insight into how academic advising supports the mission of the college and how community college administrators and academic advisors perceive academic advising relative to the mission of community colleges.

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Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCHER

"Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher" (Denzin, 1998)

My name is Zalika Akilah Brown. I was raised in a two-parent household with my five siblings. My mother recognized the importance of education and understood how it would afford me opportunities that she did not have and enrolled me in school at the early age of two. This was one of the best things she could have done for me because it laid the foundation for my long educational journey. I earned my Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Chicago State University. I then earned a Master of Social Work degree also from Chicago State University.

For four years I coordinated a college preparatory program for high school students. I was able to help navigate my students through the admissions, registration and financial aid processes at several colleges and universities. This experience gave me the desire of wanting to work at a community college. I'm currently employed as an academic advisor at a community college in Illinois. As an academic advisor I provide a number of services to students. I view advising as the hub of student support services and a shared responsibility between student and advisor. I believe I'm in a position where I can help make a difference in peoples' lives. I truly enjoy doing the work that I do and look forward to making an even greater impact as an administrator one day. I believe those who are in administrative roles have the ability to affect policies, be a

change agent and be an advocate for students. I believe everyone should have access to learning opportunities that can improve their lives. I also believe that everyone should have access to a quality, affordable education. I value education, promote growth and development, and endorse equal opportunity.

My educational philosophy is a personal, continuous process that has helped me to clearly understand and appreciate my values and work ethics. It has also helped me make informed decisions and it has validated my opinions and decisions. My personal educational philosophy encompasses that of four philosophical approaches. These philosophical approaches include: Epistemology, Realism, Reconstructionism and Social Reconstructionism.

According to Anthony and Kritsonis (2006) epistemology is concerned with what constitutes knowledge and how we arrive at it. It deals with the nature, origin and scope of knowledge and how it relates to truth and belief. It attempts to answer the basic question, what distinguishes true knowledge from false knowledge? With epistemology, the focus of modern education on all educational levels and education for students with diverse abilities is increasingly dependent upon excellence and adequacy of knowledge. Knowledge does not belong to one specialist, but through the agency of general education an understanding of higher order thinking can and should be attained by everyone.

Realism is a complex, highly refined position that is generally based on some theoretical, scientific approach. According to Anthony and Kritsonis (2006), what is real can be equated to what is valid and what is valid can be equated to what

is reliable. Valid and reliable information are at the center of the scientific method. Realists believe knowledge is important for students to become functioning members of society. They stress knowledge and the development of the mind. They also believe truth is objective, that which can be observed.

According to Anthony and Kritsonis (2006), Reconstructionism is a philosophy that advocates an attitude toward change and encourages individuals to try to make life better. Reconstructionist view the primary challenge of society as being a struggle between those who wish to preserve society as it is and those who wish to change society to be more responsive to individuals' needs. They believe in developing a sense of responsibility, self-reliance and educating by providing a wealth of opportunities. In regards to education, a Reconstructionist considers democratic control over the decisions that regulates human lives and a peaceful community as vital components to success (Anthony & Kritsonis, 2006).

Social Reconstructionism is a philosophy that emphasizes addressing social questions and a quest to create a better society and worldwide democracy. They highlight social reform as the aim of education. They believe systems must be changed to overcome oppression and improve human conditions. Community based learning, bringing world issues into the classroom and focusing on student's experience are strategies for developing social change. Social Reconstructionists want students to learn to identify problems, methods, needs and goals and to implement aggressive strategies for effecting change (Reed &

Davis, 1999). They believe students should be able to relate their academic and personal goals to local, national and world purposes.

My personal philosophy of education is aligned with that of the founding missions of community colleges. My philosophy of education is derived from my own educational experiences and personal life experiences. My studies in psychology are correlated with the ideas of Epistemology and Realism, where the scientific method and critical thinking is key. My studies in social work are correlated with Reconstructionism and Social Reconstructionism, where democratic decision making, integrated service learning and a democratic society are key. I believe community college leaders must understand and be comfortable with how community colleges' multiple missions interact. The ever changing missions and roles of community colleges require leadership at many levels of the institution to be continuously and simultaneously structured.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

Every community college has the goal of retaining its students until they have completed their program of choice. The most successful community colleges are those that have developed a well-defined mission and a shared vision for the future (Bart, 2001). There is a strong link between the community college mission and the job functions performed by academic advisors; however, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about how academic advisors can play a vital role in achieving the goals established by the community college mission and how academic advising can facilitate student success. This lack of understanding poses a conflict of perception about the role and responsibilities of academic advisors and consequently creates a negative impact for the institution. Academic advisors are not viewed as providing a critical function to the success of community colleges; therefore, academic advising may be the single most underestimated function of a successful college experience.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were: (a) identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges; (b) explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors; and (c) explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice.

Research Questions Guiding the Study

Two research questions guided the direction of the study.

1. How do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission?
2. How do community college administrators, who supervise academic advisors, perceive academic advising relative to the institution's mission?

Significance of the Study

The mission is reflective of what the community college views as important and articulates its purpose and direction. A shared mission is imperative for the success of community colleges. Also, a shared sense of the mission has the capacity to inspire and motivate those within an institution and to communicate its characteristics, purpose and values (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Missions help community college members distinguish between activities that are institutional imperatives and those that are not. Some would add that articulating a shared mission is a required first step on the road to success. Community colleges that have expressed institutional priorities and future direction, codified in their mission statements, have resulted in making better decisions regarding the college. Therefore, the mission statement is rightly understood as an artifact of a broader institutional discussion about its purpose (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). The mission also has the ability to influence policies and procedures used to make decisions about academic advising.

Few people view advising as a means of enhancing the positive outcomes of college (Preston, 1990). Research shows that advising links directly and indirectly to students' persistence in college and increases students' involvement and motivation in their college experience. An organizational structure that reflects the community colleges' mission and affirms the role academic advisors play in achieving that mission is essential. The intent of student affairs is, in part, to support the learning mission of the institution through direct support of each student, helping each student to develop fully for success in and out of the classroom (Harney, 2008). Academic advising is one of the most important functions of a community college, and student affairs practitioners must take the lead in helping colleges understand that advising helps students connect with the institution and make smart life and educational choices (O'Banion, 1994). The advising process is central to student success and retention. The role and responsibilities of academic advisors can no longer be viewed as exclusively a registration function.

Community colleges have an ethical obligation to students to ensure they have a reasonable chance of achieving academic success, assuming they do their part. To succeed academically, students often require a number of support services beyond classroom instruction, including academic advising (Vaughan, 2006). Although necessary to a college's functioning, academic advising has difficulty qualifying as a highly significant activity (Walsh, 1979). Academic advising has traditionally been considered strictly functions relating to course selection, registration, and record keeping. Recognition and appreciation of

academic advising and academic advisors has long been a professional concern. Academic advising is one of the most crucial but undervalued functions of a quality college education. The challenge is in getting students, faculty, staff, and administrators to view academic advising as essential to the mission and goals of the institution. Academic advising needs to be redefined so that developmental functions are central and that it is seen as a significant task in reaching the educational goals and mission of community colleges.

Background and Overview of the Problem

Development of Community Colleges

Two distinct names have been known to apply to two-year colleges, “junior colleges” and “community colleges.” These two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. From their beginnings until the 1940s, they were most commonly known as junior colleges. The initial term “junior college” was considered to be the place students received their freshman and sophomore level course work. At the second annual meeting of the American Association of Junior Colleges in 1922, a junior college was defined as an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Three years later this definition was slightly modified to include this statement: “The junior college may, and is likely to, develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community in which the college is located” (p.4). On the other hand, the term “community college” was considered the comprehensive, publicly supported institution and by the 1970’s was the more widely used term also

describing “junior colleges.” Community colleges are also considered the place where the highest degree awarded is an Associate in Arts or an Associate in Science.

The initial reasons for the development of junior colleges are vast and have different social, political and economic factors associated. Cohen and Brawer (2003) state that the overarching reason was the increasing demands placed on schools to solve all the social and personal ills of society. Some believe that with the move to an industrialized society, new technologies demanded the need for skilled workers. Vocational education programs were designed to teach students a more difficult skill set, which in turn lead to employment opportunities. Businessmen supposedly supported this idea so that there would be a ready supply of workers trained at the public’s expense. Others believe that because the growth of secondary school enrollments was increasing in the twentieth century, the demand for access to college grew rapidly and was inevitable.

Yet another reason is that several prominent educators wanted the university to abandon their freshman and sophomore classes and relegate the function of teaching adolescents to a new set of institutions, to be called junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). These educators insisted that the university would not become true research and professional development centers until they relinquished their lower-division preparatory work. It was also suggested that the development of junior colleges stemmed from the need of parents wanting their children to remain close to home until they were mature enough to attend a university. Another belief is that there was a grand scheme to keep poor people

in their place by diverting them to programs leading to low-paying occupational positions. This belief seems to stem from those who perceive a capitalist conspiracy behind all societal events (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). All the motives stated above for the initial development of junior colleges are debatable. Regardless of how community colleges were established, there is no question that these institutions certainly provided a valuable function for higher education in America then and continues to do so now.

Community College Mission

Regardless of their geographic region and clientele, community colleges share many of the same values, goals, and ideals for themselves and their students (Vaughan, 2006). They have a commitment to serving their communities, open access, and comprehensiveness in course and program offerings. According to Vaughan (2006),

> the community college mission is to provide access to postsecondary educational programs and services that lead to stronger, more vital communities. The way in which individual community colleges achieve this mission may differ: Some colleges emphasize college transfer programs; others emphasize technical education. However, the commitment to offering courses, programs, training, and other services is essentially the same for all community colleges. (p. 3)

Vaughan (2006) states that the mission of most community colleges is shaped by five commitments

- Serving all segments of society through open-access admissions policy that offers equal and fair treatment to all students.
- Providing a comprehensive educational program.
- Serving the community as a community-based institution of higher education.
- Teaching and learning.
- Fostering lifelong learning.

The community college is an open-admissions institution accepting a diverse group of students with varied backgrounds and needs. Fundamental to the open access mission of community colleges includes offering low tuition rates. According to Vaughan (2006) open access and equity means that once a student is enrolled, the college provides support services, including counseling, academic advising, financial aid, and helping to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed academically. The comprehensiveness mission can be easily understood when you consider the diversity in student goals and community needs. Serving the community by responding to its professed needs is a vital aspect of the community college mission. Most observers agree that it is important for community colleges to sponsor art exhibits, health fairs, community forums, and other activities that enrich the lives of the people served by the college (Vaughan, 2006). They ultimately serve as cultural, social, and intellectual hubs in their communities.

Community colleges are unquestionably committed to teaching and learning. They are the very institutions where student services are most needed to

enhance and reinforce the learning process (Vaughan, 2006). To achieve its mission, community colleges provide numerous programs, activities, and services. These include college transfer programs, career-technical education, developmental education, community services and support services.

Career and Technical Education

Today, community colleges supply vocational training programs that terminate in certificates, associate degrees, remedial education services and customized courses designed to meet the needs of local employers (Kasper, 2002). Short-term certificate programs allow students to train quickly to enter the workforce or to pursue career advancement. According to Bragg (2001), there is a new vocationalism that is more holistic in its educational approach than traditional vocational education is by combining academic and vocational-technical skill development needed for the new economy and improving articulation across educational levels. This new vocationalism reflects a growing emphasis on vocational-technical education for growth industries incorporating academic outcomes, a market-driven responsiveness to ever-changing business and industry skill needs, and an emphasis on lifelong learning that is focused on skill rather than degree acquisition.

Community college critics have blamed vocational education for pulling students away from the transfer function thereby diminishing opportunity for upward mobility. This shift suggests that the mission of community college has less prominence on education, social needs and individual development and more prominence on training, economic needs of business and industry and

workforce preparation and retraining. Vocational education has assumed great importance as community colleges have expanded their mission to address growing workforce, economic, and community needs (Bragg, 2001). Vocational education remains essential for the United States to compete in a global economy and for American workers to keep up with the changing skills needed in the workplace (Vaughan, 2006).

Developmental Education

A large number of community college students have difficulty with postsecondary level reading, writing, and math, necessitating remedial education, also called developmental education. According to Perin (2006), remedial education has been defined as "a class or activity intended to meet the needs of the students who initially do not have the skills, experience or orientation necessary to perform at a level that the institution or instructors recognize as 'regular' for those students" (p.340). One major function of the community college is providing remedial instruction for traditional-age and adult students who are not prepared for college level work. Although remedial coursework is only one part of a developmental approach that could also include tutoring, academic support services, advising and counseling, it appears to be the most controversial part of the developmental education equation (Oudenhoven, 2002).

According to Oudenhover (2002), higher education has a long history of serving under prepared students; the issue of remediation is currently on the agenda of an educational and social debate. How or even whether higher

education should address the needs of students who are not prepared for college level work is a sticky topic. Most colleges assess incoming students in reading, writing, and math, and most institutions are very clear about the criteria they use to do this. However, there is not complete consensus among institutions on what constitutes college level work. In fact, considerable variation exists in remedial assessment and placement policy, which is formulated by both states and local institutions (Perin, 2006). There has been little in-depth investigation of how postsecondary remedial policies are operationalized at state and local levels, how state and institutional remedial policies are related, or how these policies bear on access and standards goals.

Most of the concern over remedial education centers on traditional age students. Sixty percent of the remedial population consists of students who attend college immediately after high school but are still not prepared for their thirteenth year (Oudenhoven, 2000). It has been reported that up to 80% of community college students enroll in at least one remedial course, and at urban institutions, over one quarter of students enroll in remedial courses (Perin, 2006).

Remedial education is central to the community college mission and integral to the open admission policy of community colleges, which is a necessary service if the community college door is to be kept open (Perin, 2006). According to Bundy (2000), community colleges must commit to an identity in which their primary role is providing basic skills including remediation education and job training education. This would not eliminate the transfer role, but it would put the

community college on track to take care of the immediate needs of the students it serves.

Nevertheless, community colleges have been criticized for being overly involved in remediation at the expense of baccalaureate transfer and for duplicating K-12 education. Opponents of college remediation argue that the availability of remediation in college removes incentives to do well in high school, detracts from the education of prepared college students by dumbing down courses, and leads to low graduation rates (Oudenhoven, 2000). Some insist that colleges should not teach what high schools have already received tax dollars to provide. Many four-year institutions maintain that remedial courses are not college level and are therefore not their responsibility. Those who advocate offering remediation at all levels of higher education argue that shifting full responsibility for remediation to community colleges may be unfair to both the colleges and the students. They pronounce that isolating remedial education in the community colleges creates a caste system between two-year and four-year institutions and may limit opportunities for students.

Today's community colleges undertake a number of different functions in an attempt to meet the wide-ranging needs of their constituents (Bragg, 2001). A constant for community colleges has been their ability to quickly adapt to demands of society. Remediation in higher education is a difficult issue with complex causes, solutions and critical implications for education and society. Because community colleges are committed to serving all students, one of their greatest challenges is determining which policies, programs, and pedagogical

approaches will lead students to success in achieving their varied and individual goals (Oudenhover, 2002).

Community colleges should remain true to their mission and provide underprepared students with remedial education. Community colleges are open-admission institutions and serve whoever walks through the door. Students who may not have acquired basic skills because of language barriers, a learning disability, or other learning impediments brought on by various life circumstances may need courses in English, writing, or math (Vaughan, 2006). Some of the brightest students enrolled in community colleges may need pre-college courses before enrolling in college level courses. In general, it is the community college perspective that society cannot afford to leave anyone behind and that developmental education is a crucial part of the commitment to access, student success, and community building (Vaughan, 2006).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Critical Theory

The work done by members of the Frankfurt School led to a paradigm that is called Critical Theory (Willis, 2007). The Frankfurt School also known as the Institute for Social Research was founded in 1923 at the University of Frankfurt. The members were well known scholars such as Max Horkheimer, Eric Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, who thought that classical Marxism theory was insufficient in dealing with the complexities of social and economic structures of modern society. The term neo-Marxism is sometimes applied to the ideas and concepts that emerged from the Frankfurt School (Willis, 2007).

Critical Theory seeks to expose dominating relationships and is concerned with human action and interaction. The primary analysis in Critical Theory is conflicting relationships. It is hoped that these relationships remain stable, at least until society has been radically transformed. In simpler terms, Critical Theory research emphasizes relationships that involve inequities and power, and a desirable aspect of critical theory research involves helping those without power to acquire it (Willis, 2007).

Critical Theorist examines the inevitable negative influences that power relationships create. According to Underwood (1998) as cited by Willis (2007),

> if critical theory were defined briefly, a central point would be the emancipatory imperative directed towards the abolition of social injustice and …[the focus] principally on a critique of ideology, showing how repressive interests underlie the ostensibly neutral formulations of science, politics, economics, and culture in general. (p.49)

Critical Theory is concerned with providing people with knowledge and understandings to free them from oppression. The point of theory is to generate knowledge that will change, not just interpret, the world (Brookfield, 2001). Critical Theory has as its explicit intent to galvanize people into replacing capitalism with truly democratic social arrangements. According to Brookfield (2001), the knowledge critical theory produces can be considered useful to the extent that it helps change the behavior of its unit of analysis (people acting in society). The theory's usefulness depends partly on people recognizing that it expresses accurately the desires they have for a better, more authentic way to

live. Therefore, an important indicator of the validity of Critical Theory is the extent to which people believe the theory captures their hopes and dreams.

Critical Theory tries to generate a specific vision of the world as it might be. It springs from a distinct philosophical vision of what it means to live as a developed person, as a mature adult struggling to realize one's humanity through the creation of a society that is just, fair, and compassionate (Brookfield, 2001). The theory envisions a less alienated, more democratic world where people can realize their creativity and humanity. Questioning societal order and fighting for people's freedom is entrenched in critical theory. One of the main continuing legacies of Critical Theory has been to see that democracy is the unfinished project of modernity and its further realization and transformation of a genuine goal even in complex and globalizing societies (Horkheimer, 1982).

Critical theory will be instrumental in demonstrating the relationship between academic advisors and community college administrators who have the power to define the role and responsibilities of academic advisors. It will also focus on how the power relationship impacts the perception academic advisors and administrators have about what the role and responsibilities of academic advisors are and should be. The salient concepts relevant to critical theory that have structured the study include marginalization, hegemony and positionality.

Marginalization

The concept of marginalization was generalized from political struggles of women, people of color, the poor, immigrants, children, and victims of violence (Hall, 1999). Marginalization refers to the overt or covert treatment of individuals

or groups of people who because of some characteristic are singled out by the larger society and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. Marginalization can also be defined as the process of putting an individual or a group at the margins and denying them access to the main benefits that the dominant group has under its control (Hall, 1999). According to Hall (1999), an assumption of marginalization is that no one wants to be marginalized.

Hall (1999) also suggests that the network of power dominates social structures and extends punitive treatment to the marginalized even if they are not cognizant of their perceived deviance. Unsuspectingly a person's behavior can be shaped to conformity. Therefore, an aspect of marginalization might then be lack of information about what is "normal" or expected (Hall, 1999). Consequently, there is a need to know the rules of the game. Advocating social transformation is common to critical theory. Collective activism may increase social support and visibility, and provide positive images for marginalized people (Hall, 1999).

Hegemony

Hegemony is the process by which dominant groups maintain its dominant position over another group through the use of formalized power. Hegemony also controls the way new ideas are rejected through the exclusion of others in the process. Gramsci (1995) defines hegemony as the way a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates, or the ways it coerces those it rules; having complete control over a system or a structure. Brookfield (2001)

states that hegemony describes the way people learn to accept dominant ideologies as natural and in their best interest. According to Gramsci (1995) people learn to embrace as commonsense wisdom certain beliefs and political conditions that work against their interests and serve those of the powerful. People learn to accept governing as preordained and part of the culture.

The emphasis shifts from understanding how the state or sovereign imposes a view of the world on neutral, skeptical, or resentful populace to understanding how people are willing partners with the ruling group actively colluding in their own oppression (Brookfield, 2001). Gramsci's (1995) idea of hegemony is powerful yet adaptable, able to reconfigure itself, skillfully incorporates resistance, and give just enough away to its opponents while remaining more or less intact (Brookfield, 2001). For Gramsci (1995), the point of political action is to establish a new hegemony, one that represents the interests of the majority.

Positionality

Positionality as defined by Maher & Tetreault (1994), is a term used to describe how people are defined, that is not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed. They also define positionality as "the knower's specific position in any context as defined by race, gender, class and other socially significant dimensions" (p.22). Positionality implies relationship; that is, we are only privileged or marginal in relation to someone else.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this study were to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges; to explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors; and to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice. The two research questions guiding the study were: (1) How do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission and (2) How do community college administrators, who supervise academic advisors, perceive academic advising relative to the institution's mission?

This chapter provides a review of the literature. To examine the phenomenon under study, it was crucial to explore several bodies of literature related to academic advising. The bodies of literature reviewed focused on the following six areas: Differing Mission and Purpose of Community Colleges, to expand the background of the problem; Overview of Academic Advising, to provide a historical perspective relevant to the purposes of this study; Developmental Academic Advising, to examine how academic advising supports the mission of community colleges; Academic Advising as a Profession, to provide the practitioners perspective on the role of academic advisors; Roles and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors, to provide information relative to the

research questions guiding the study; and Academic Advising and Retention, to gain information relative to the purposes of the study.

Differing Mission and Purpose of Community Colleges

A mission statement is defined as a formal document that articulates the organization's purposes and direction (Hill & Jones, 2001). A mission statement stresses values, positive behaviors, and guiding principles within the framework of the organization's announced belief system and ideology (Hill & Jones, 2001). According to Bart (2001), there are three general benefits for the use of mission statements: they guide decision making, they motivate and inspire employees toward a common purpose and they create balance among the competing interests of stakeholders. Without a mission and shared vision of the future, decision making may lead to organizational conflict and rivalry among competing interests. Understanding and supporting the mission should be expected of all community college leaders, because the most successful community colleges are those that have a shared mission and vision of the future (Bart, 2001).

Just what is the mission of community colleges? Historically and traditionally the mission of community colleges has been broad. The debate is never-ending as to what exactly is the mission of community colleges. The "comprehensiveness" mission of community colleges was established in 1947 when President Truman's Commission on Higher Education encouraged community colleges to "attempt to meet the total post-high school needs of the community" and comprehensiveness has since flourished as the community college steadily adopted more missions (Bogart, 1994).

There are those who support the multiple missions of community college, stating that it is necessary to fulfill statutory mandates; and then there are critics who believe that community colleges have too many missions making it difficult to maintain all of them (McPhail &McPhail, 2006). Levin (2000), in his study of community college missions, regards the comprehensive mission of community colleges as inevitable by recasting their broadening institutional identity as a process of globalization. Recognizing the environment in which community colleges function, new or different missions often appear as the institution responds to changing student needs. Community colleges provide a plethora of services adapted to accommodate the changing needs of the community, such as career and technical education (CTE).

Community colleges are most well-known for their goal of providing educational access to all, affordability and serving the community in which they reside. These aspects of the community college mission are primarily what distinguish it from their four-year institution counterpart. Community colleges are access institutions because they are the point of entry for such a large proportion of the college population (Dusty, 2003). They provide access to many students that were traditionally denied higher education admission, including minorities, women, and academically underprepared students. Community colleges provide an opportunity for these students to change their lives through education.

There have been numerous discussions about what community colleges purpose, mission, role and responsibilities are. According to Bundy (2000), the community college has an identity problem: it is confused and conflicted about

just who it is. Part of this confusion arises from its past. Almost all of today's "community colleges" were known as "junior colleges"; the connection to four-year colleges was made very clear (Bundy, 2000). It was evident that the junior college was where students attended when they either did not have the grades or were lacking the money to enter a four-year institution. The junior college primary purpose was transferring students to four-year institutions. Brint and Karabel (1989) argue that an institutional change occurred for community colleges in the 1960's, with a dramatic shift from a liberal arts orientation to a vocational one. The mission of the community college in the 1990's changed from that of previous decades, where "community" implied all facets and interest of local populations to a role of serving the economy, specifically the interest of capital by producing labor and reducing public sector spending (Levin, 2000). According to Levin (2000), there are several tracks of discourse on the community college mission in the latter half of the twentieth century.

> One track included a curricular focus, particularly stressing academic, vocation and remedial education. Another track encompassed the purposes of the institution: individual and community development, social and economic mobility of the individual and social stratification and social reproduction. The educational and training role of the community college made up a third track: the institution as a pipeline to baccalaureate degrees, as job preparation sites and as a place for potential success and failure in society (Levin, 2001, p. 1)

Throughout their history, community colleges, known as the people's college, have been sought to respond to ongoing challenges, changes, and dynamics of society (Gillett-Karam, 1996). One of the purposes of community college outlined by Cohen and Brawer (1989), include comprehensiveness and access as paramount aims. Community college personifies "grass-roots" higher education in respect to their civic responsibility and community relations. More than any other segment of higher education, community colleges have fostered a belief in the democratic ideal of a society in which all may reach their potential through education and hard work (Langhorst, 1997).

Community colleges are open-admission institutions and serve whoever walks through the door. They provide low-cost affordable tuition and deliver programs to meet the needs of the local community. Collaborative structures typical of community colleges allow for diversity, not just geographic or ethnic, but diversity of thinking patterns, behavioral habits, and approaches to work. Diversity arises not just from the students served and the professionals employed, but perhaps most importantly, from the many missions of the community colleges (Romero, 2004).

Today's community colleges undertake a number of different functions in an attempt to meet the wide-ranging needs of their constituents (Bragg, 2001). A constant for community colleges has been their ability to quickly adapt to demands of society. Transfer and liberal arts, career and technical education (CTE), continuing education, community services, and remedial education are central to the comprehensive mission of community colleges. Some of these

functions were evident when junior colleges originated, but others emerged as the needs of students, employers, schools, universities, the community and other entities changed. Community colleges have typically provided what Kane and Rouse (1999) term the “transfer function.” That is, community college students complete two years of a general undergraduate education, sometimes receive an associate degree, and then transfer (if they have the desire, interest and capability) to a four-year college to complete a bachelor’s degree. Today, academic preparation is still a core function of community colleges.

Multiple viewpoints of what the community college mission is exist. Several scholars have defined the community college mission, such as Fountain and Tollefson (1989) Vaughn (1997) Tollefson (1998) and more recently Cohen and Brawer (2003). There are a myriad of other researchers that have illustrated the mission of community colleges aside from the above-mentioned. All of the perspectives on the community college mission either entail what community colleges actually do in terms of services provided or emphasize what community colleges are about. Both depictions of the community college mission are appropriate for this study.

Similarities exist in all of the various descriptions of the community college mission. For example, commonalities include the transfer function, career and technical education, community service, remedial education and continuing education. The top two common threads regarding the community college mission are the transfer function and career and technical education. As the times in which we live change, so does the mission of community colleges.

Cohen and Brawer (2003), describe the community college mission as student services, career education, developmental education, community education, and the collegiate functions (transfer and liberal arts). For the purposes of this study, Cohen and Brawer's (2003) definition was used to guide and support the study when referring to the mission of community colleges.

To expand on the background of the problem for this study, a review of the community college mission was essential. As the research shows, community colleges have struggled with defining their mission and have been accused by critics of having too many missions. Few studies have attempted to show the link between the community college mission and the role and responsibilities of academic advisors, possibly due to the lack of consensus on defining the community college mission. In order to provide support of this link, the researcher had to first provide a historical review of the community college mission and provide a solid definition of the community college mission for the use of this study.

Overview of Academic Advising

Although academic advising has been a defined region within education for only a few short decades, it has been a prevalent concern since the birth of college institutions in America (Gillispie, 2003). In 1870, Harvard's President Charles W. Eliot appointed the first administrator in charge of student discipline and development and initiated the elective system that created the need for advisement about course choices (Tuttle, 2000). In 1876, John Hopkins University established a faculty advisor system, and by the 1930s most colleges

and universities had developed organized approaches to academic advising (Tuttle, 2000).

Academic advising began to emerge throughout the nineteenth century as faculty began treating students as free thinkers accountable for their own developmental choices. As a result, faculty became more involved in guiding students to the classes they needed. According to Gillispie (2003), Frank Parsons contributed to the movement for vocational guidance stressing three imperatives for personal development: a clear understanding of self, aptitudes, abilities, interest, resources, limitations, and other qualities; knowledge of the requirements and conditions of different professions and; the opportunities and advantages of each professional field. These imperatives are what initially led to the idea of advising and counseling in the collegiate environment, securing its place in higher education history (Gillispie, 2003).

Adopted from the army as a technique used during World War I, universities instituted vocational guidance centers that employed occupational aptitude assessments as a means for advising students in their academic endeavors. The Progressive Education Movement of the 1920s focused on the self-direction of the student, placing emphasis on the role of educators as “mentors” who were integral in the development of the student (Gillispie, 2003). In the 60s and 70s, baby boomers flooded college campuses bringing an overabundance of developmental issues, which created a demand for student advising and counseling. While the concern for social justice, access, usefulness, and accountability became the focal point of student services, it was especially true of

academic advising (Gillispie, 2003). As diversity of the student body and concerns about student retention increased so did the need for professional advisors and comprehensive advising systems (Frost, 1991). Traditional faculty responsibilities grew, producing opportunities for new roles and positions, particularly that of academic advisor.

The first National Conference on Academic Advising was in 1977 followed by the founding of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 1979, which started the process of academic advising as a profession. Early in the 1980s, due to a lack of faculty interest or rewards for advising and the demand by students for improved advising, many colleges and universities established advising centers or more structured advising efforts. Academic advising became an examined activity when those doing advising began to compare how they conducted advising to how it was being conducted at other institutions (Kuh, 2006).

Although academic advising originated at four-year institutions with faculty, community colleges also employ academic advisors. Academic advising holds great importance on community college campus as an integrative process because of the unique mission of these institutions (Harney, 2008). Probably the key difference in advising at community colleges versus four institutions is the nature of the student population- predominantly first generation, commuter, underprepared and diverse in all ways including age, ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic background (King, 2002). This means that advisors often need to focus on the basics – what is a credit, what does it mean to be matriculated, how

do you create a class schedule, how should you manage your time, etc (King, 2002). When advising underprepared students, a considerable amount of time is exhausted in explaining the meaning of developmental course work and persuading the student that those courses are necessary. Community colleges are expected to experience an increase in student diversity and student enrollment. With this in mind, community colleges will be repeatedly challenged to provide adequate and appropriate student services, especially academic advising (Harney, 2008).

Due to the purposes of this study, it was important to review literature pertaining to academic advising. The researcher wanted to accomplish three objectives in reviewing this body of literature: (a) to explain the importance and purposes of academic advising, especially at community colleges; (b) to show the evolution of academic advising in U.S. higher education; and (c) to explain the unique difference of academic advising at community colleges versus four year institutions.

Developmental Advising

Creamer and Creamer (1994) state that developmental academic advising is the use of interactive teaching, counseling, and administrative strategies to assist students to achieve specific learning, developmental, career, and life goals. These goals are made by students with the assistance of the advisor and are used as a guide for all interactions between advisor and student. Developmental advising encourages students to ask open-ended questions and use campus resources to find answers.

Groundbreaking articles by Crookston (1972) on developmental advising and O'Banion (1972) on a five-stage academic advising model changed the face of academic advising in U.S. higher education and opened the door to the professionalization of the field (Habley, 1981). The term developmental academic advising was coined by Burns B. Crookston in an article he wrote in the *Journal of College Student Personnel* titled "A Developmental View of Academic Advising as Teaching" and the term developmental academic advising was born. Developmental academic advising is the academic advising delivery model most endorsed and widely used by professional academic advisors. It is an approach to advising that has gained the most recognition in the academic advising profession.

Developmental academic advising serves a critical role in helping community colleges meet the challenges of and demands for quality education (Raushi, 1993). Quality advising impacts both the student and the college community. Developmental advising requires the advisor to have a developmental understanding of people and systems; it is a comprehensive, collaborative, and empowering process toward maximizing student's potential.

The word "developmental," was borrowed from psychology and counseling, but should not be confused with psychotherapy or personal counseling. The conceptualization of advising as a form of teaching, with advisors focusing on student development, is the perspective most often presented as educationally appropriate (Smith & Allen, 2006). According to Smith and Allen (2006), this perspective referred to as developmental advising can be best described as:

- a student-centered process that acknowledges the individuality of students,
- connects curricular and co-curricular aspects of their educational experience,
- helps them integrate life, career, and educational goals, and
- provides scaffolding that gives them opportunities to practice decision-making and problem solving skills. (p. 56)

According to Crookston (1994),

> developmental academic advising "is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision, but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills. Not only are these advising functions, but they are essentially teaching functions as well" (p.5)

Developmental advising involves both students' internal development (what the students want to become) as well as students' social development (the relationship of their goals to postsecondary education and the world at large).

Developmental advising has typically been distinguished from prescriptive advising, which is based on the authority and primary responsibility of the advisor and involves the dispensing of information about courses and class schedules and the prescribing of remedies for problems (Smith & Allen, 2006). In this relationship, the student is passive and the flow of information is strictly in one direction. According to Smith and Allen (2006), with prescriptive advising the

emphasis is on telling the students what to do and what they need to know rather than providing them with choices and opportunities for decision making. In this respect, prescriptive advising can not be disregarded, but advising should always have a goal that goes beyond just providing information.

Giving students accurate information about degree requirements and helping them understand policies and procedures at their institution is paramount (Smith & Allen, 2006). Effective academic advising likely includes many developmental aspects with some prescriptive elements that are equally important, such as receiving accurate information. Using the argument that students prefer it or that it has a greater impact on student success, many authors have purported that developmental advising is better than prescriptive advising (Smith & Allen, 2006).

Winston, Miller, and Grites (1984) defined developmental academic advising as,

> a systemic process based on close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources. It both stimulates and supports students in their quest for an enriched quality of life. It reflects the institution's mission of total student development and is most likely to be realized when the academic affairs and student affairs divisions collaborate in its implementation (p. 19)

Developmental advising understands advising as a system of shared responsibility in which the primary goal is to help the students take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Crookston (1994) notes that students and

advisors should share responsibility for the nature and quality of the advising relationship. It is the advisors responsibility to provide an atmosphere where the student feels comfortable engaging in dialogue that addresses concerns, limitation, and barriers to accomplishing goals.

In reviewing the literature on developmental academic advising, it was important to show how this method of advising supports the mission of community colleges, which is one of the purposes of the study. Developmental academic advising theory serves as a foundation for delivering academic advising services to students. This approach to advising is widely used by professional academic advisors in the field; therefore for this study, it was appropriate to examine its functions as it relates to the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors.

Academic Advising as a Profession

To expand the background of the problem, the researcher felt it was necessary to review literature that supports how academic advising truly qualifies as a profession. As stated earlier, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about how academic advisors can play a vital role in achieving the goals established by the community college mission, part of this problem may be related to how academic advising is viewed or not viewed as a profession on community college campuses.

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is a professionally recognized organization whose primary interest is in the practice of academic advising. NACADA provides a Statement of Core Values to affirm the

importance of advising within the academy and acknowledges the impact that advising interactions can have on individuals, institutions and society (NACADA, 2004). The Statement of Core Values serves as a framework to guide the professional practice of academic advising and reminds advisors of their responsibilities to students, colleagues, institutions, society, and themselves. The Core Values are reference points that advisors use to consider their individual philosophies, strengths, and opportunities for professional growth (NACADA, 2004). The Core Values are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with up to date professional practices and philosophies.

There are six Core Value Statements established by NACADA. First, advisors are responsible to the individuals they advise. Academic advisors work to strengthen the importance, dignity, potential, and unique nature of each individual within the academic setting (NACADA, 2004). Second, advisors are responsible for involving others when appropriate in the advising process because effective advising requires a holistic approach. In doing so, advisors actively seek resources and recognize their limitations, thereby referring students to others that can further assist in the student needs. Third, advisors are responsible to their institution. They uphold the specific policies, procedures, and values of their department and institutions (NACADA, 2004). Furthermore, advisors maintain clear lines of communication with those not directly involved in the advising process, but who have the responsibility and authority for decisions regarding academic advising at the institution (NACADA, 2004). Consequently, advisors recognize their individual role in the success of their institution. Fourth,

advisors are responsible to higher education. Advisors advocate for student educational achievement to the highest attainable standard, support student goals, and uphold the educational mission of the institution (NACADA, 2004). Fifth, advisors are responsible to their educational community and interpret their institution's mission as well as its goals and values. Advisors are familiar with community programs and services that may provide students with additional educational opportunities and resources (NACADA, 2004). Sixth, advisors are responsible for their professional practices and for themselves personally. Advisors participate in professional development opportunities to enhance their professional growth and development to be responsible of themselves and their institutions (NACADA, 2004).

According to Church (2005), advisors should remind themselves before every advising appointment of the Core Values because they must continually be aware that they are responsible to the individuals they advise, their institution, higher education and themselves. This simple task will put into perspective the importance of academic advising and remind advisors that they are working for many different interests.

Academic advising, more than other student services areas, demands expertise in academic areas and is enhanced by teaching experience (Tuttle, 2000). According to Tuttle (2000) a NACADA survey indicated that 43% of institutions polled require a bachelor's degree for the academic advisor position and 80% preferred a master's degree. Forty percent asked for one to three

years of experience. Experience in teaching and counseling was often a required or preferred qualification.

Who advises and how advising services are delivered have been major questions asked about academic advising in the last two decades (Tuttle, 2000). Faculty are generally hired with the assumption that they will teach without realizing when they accepted a teaching position that they would be expected to advise students as well. While faculty may bring breadth of vision about a field of knowledge, they are often oblivious of the setting in which they teach and the constraints that this setting often imposes on students (Walsh, 1979). Typically, faculty members are not aware of graduation requirements or that the courses they teach are only a small part of what a student will take (Walsh, 1979).

Professional advisors have student development backgrounds, advising is their priority, they are typically housed in a central location with easy accessibility, they are trained to advise across all program areas, and they are trained to work with students who are exploratory or developmental (King, 2005). Advisors bring multiple perspectives to the student: how the courses fit in with their major, how the course and major contribute to the student's academic goals, and how these goals contribute to the student's life goals (Walsh, 1979). Academic advisors perform a unique function within the college by bringing multiple perspectives to the students and by performing developmental functions. According to Midgen (1989), professional advisors are in the best position to meet student needs because they understand the needs of students, are

committed to the retention of students, are more accessible than faculty, and link students to other campus services.

Role and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors

Due to the purposes of this study and the research questions guiding this study, a review of the literature on the role and responsibilities of academic advisors was inescapable. The role and responsibilities of academic advisors is a fundamental part of this study. In order to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges and in order to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in the retention of students, it was imperative to the study to delineate academic advisor's role and responsibilities.

Academic advising has been defined by many institutions and scholars in the field. O'Banion (1994) defines advising as a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment. Crockett (1987) states that academic advising is a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. The advisor serves as facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning, academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary. The University of Arizona describes academic advising as a collaborative relationship between a student and advisor. The intent of this

collaboration is to assist the student in the development of meaningful educational goals that are consistent with personal interest, values, and abilities. The academic advisor is granted formal authority by the academic unit to approve the student's academic program of study and assist the student in progressing toward the appropriate degree.

Academic advising is integral to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of higher education (NACADA, 2006). Academic advising teaches students how to become active members of the educational community, to process information critically, and to become citizens of a democratic society and global community. According to NACADA (2006) academic advising engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution. NACADA (2006) states that academic advising has three components: curriculum (what advising deals with), pedagogy (how advising does what it does), and student learning outcomes (the result of academic advising).

Academic advising mostly derives from theories in social science, education and humanities. The curriculum of academic advising includes, but is not limited to, the institution's mission, culture and expectations; the meaning, value, and interrelationship of the institution's curriculum and co-curriculum; modes of thinking, learning, and decision-making; the selection of academic programs and courses; the development of life and career goals; campus/community resources, policies, and procedures; and the transferability of skills and knowledge (NACACA, 2006). The pedagogy of academic advising stresses the teaching

and learning process that integrates the preparation, facilitation, documentation, and assessment of advising interactions.

The relationship between advisor and student is fundamental and is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior (NACADA, 2006). The student learning outcomes of academic advising are guided by an institution's mission, goals, curriculum and co-curriculum (NACADA, 2006). The outcomes express what students will demonstrate, learn, value, and do as a result of partaking in academic advising. Grounded in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, academic advising is an on-going process of deliberate interactions with a curriculum, pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the framework of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes (NACADA, 2006).

Student learning is the reason why community colleges exist; the mission is reflective of this. Realizing this truth, academic advisors and other student affairs practitioners refer to themselves as being "student-centered". Academic advisors are a central part of the primary intake and processing services such as registration, orientation, test interpretation, career planning and one-on-one advising (Preston, 1990). According to Culp (2005), some of the core values academic advisors encompass consist of, ensuring access and opportunity for all, developing the whole student, providing quality services to meet the student needs, believing that all students matter, facilitating student learning and

success, and believing in the educational richness and power of the out-of-classroom environment.

According to Preston (1990), academic advisors perform the roles of student developers and learning agents. As student developers, advisors communicate to students the importance of skill building and other academic requirements and help them understand the value of their academic endeavors. As learning agents, advisors assist, manage, and encourage students to build a pattern of success, as well as serving as student advocates and promoting student retention. The key to achieving community colleges mission is in the role performed by academic advisors. But, often times the academic advisors' roles are not appreciated or at the very least acknowledged. The position of academic advisors and what they offer is not seen as integral to the mission of the community college.

Research indicates that frequent and meaningful student contact with members of the college, especially contact focusing on intellectual or career-related issues, seems to increase student's involvement and motivation (Frost, 1991). During the advising process, students can learn to discover options, frame questions, gather information, and make decisions, which can increase their involvement in college and help them to persist to graduation (Frost, 1991). Academic advisors have the capacity to increase meaningful contact with students and to support them to persist in college. Other typical duties of academic advisors include assisting students with class scheduling, adding and dropping classes, declaring and changing majors, approving graduation plans,

coordinating new student orientation, serving as a liaison to academic departments, helping those with unsatisfactory academic progress, interpreting academic policies and referring students to other campus services (Tuttle, 2000).

Academic advisors can play an integral role in promoting student success. Kuh (2006) conducted a study of 20 diverse colleges and universities, in which four major themes surrounding academic advising resonated. First, advisors know their institution well. Advisors believe their primary task is to help change students for the better by making certain they take full advantage of the institution's resources for learning (Kuh, 2006). Second, advisors strive for meaningful interactions with students. Connecting with advisees is essential, these relationships are especially important for students in underrepresented groups on campus (Kuh, 2006). Third, advisors help students identify pathways to academic and social success. Advisors encourage students to take advantage of the educational opportunities the college makes available. They make a point of asking students to apply what they are learning in their classes to real life issues; thereby enhancing student learning in ways that many academic courses alone may not be able to accomplish (Kuh, 2006). Fourth, advising and student success has to be a tag team effort. The educational and personal development goals of advising have to be shared among advisors, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Academic advisors wear many hats. Their role and responsibilities are multi-faceted. Table 1 provides a summary of the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors based on a synthesis of the literature.

Table 1

Academic Advisors' Roles and Responsibilities

Teacher and Guide	Clarifies Life/Career Goals	Assists in Declaring Majors
Develop Educational Plans	Facilitator of Communication	Assists w/Class Scheduling
Referral Agent	Developing the Whole Student	Approve Graduation Plans
Student Advocate	Promote Student Retention	New Student Orientation
Liaison to Academic Departments	Interpret Academic Policies	Identify Pathways to Academic Success

Academic Advising and Retention

For the purpose of this study, retention is defined simply as persisting in school until the student's chosen program or degree is completed. The role academic advisors play in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice was one of the purposes of the study. Therefore, a review of the literature on academic advising and retention was examined to gain more depth in learning how academic advising can assist in institutional retention efforts.

Student retention is a vital concern for higher education, especially community colleges. Community college students face insurmountable impediments to

academic success such as, being first-generation college students, having poor academic skills, being burdened by family and work pressures, and being a language minority student (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Community colleges account for almost 49% of all minority student enrollments in higher education. Community colleges are becoming the educational institution of choice for more and more first-time, full-time college students. Because of these student demographics, community colleges are increasingly at risk of having low retention rates (Evon, 2003). Vincent Tinto (1987) a nationally recognized retention scholar notes that strengthening institutional efforts aimed at increasing student retention may be a more effective enrollment management strategy than devoting more resources to increasing student recruitment.

In fulfilling their mission to provide services to a diverse group of individuals, community colleges often find that their retention rates suffer as a result (Goel, 2002). However, retaining students is fundamental to the ability of community colleges to carry out its mission. Community colleges need strong support services to help students remain in institutions and achieve their goals. Academic advising is perhaps the most critical of those services; therefore advising can be viewed as the hub of the student services wheel, providing the linkages with other support services such as career planning, counseling, financial aid, and tutoring (King, 1993).

Academic advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution (Habley, 1981). Advisors can help students

become integrated within the academic and social systems on campus. Tinto (1987) indicates that effective retention programs have to come to understand that academic advising is at the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. Any retention effort must clearly recognize the value of academic advising to the success of students and the necessity that advising becomes a central part of the collaborative campus-wide focus on the success of our students (Nutt, 2003).

Academic advising has been a part of higher education since its inception, but only in the past three decades has it been recognized as an effective means to influence student learning and retention (Grits, 1998). Research confirms that academic advising that connects the student to the institution can have a significant effect on student motivation, involvement and retention. Wyckoff (1999) states, “To establish a high degree of commitment to the academic advising process, university and college administrators must become cognizant not only of the educational value of advising but of the role advising plays in retention of students” (p. 3).

Habley (1981) suggests that students who formulate a sound educational and career plan based on their values, interests, and abilities will have an increased chance for academic success, satisfaction, and persistence. Crockett (1978) described academic advising as the cornerstone of student retention, noting that when it is provided effectively, it helps students develop more mature education and career goals, strengthens the relationship between academic preparation

and the world of work, and contributes to the development of a more positive attitude and better academic performance.

Tinto (1987) developed a retention model that focuses on the academic and social integration of college students. His model implies that students enter college with various backgrounds, skills, and experiences by which higher education institutions have no control over. These attributes contribute to the student's intentions, goals, and commitment to the institution. Once a student enters the institution, subsequent experiences occur within the academic and social systems of the institution that involve interaction with faculty, staff, and students (King, 1993). If the student's interactions are positive, the student will become integrated into those systems and the student's goals and institutional commitment will be strengthened and the likelihood of the student persisting at the institution is greater.

On the other hand, if the student's interactions are negative, the student will fail to be integrated within the academic and social systems of the institution, with a possible result of the student leaving the institution. One can conclude then, that strong developmental academic advising programs that promote student interaction with faculty and staff can greatly enhance a student's integration into the academic and social systems of the institution (King, 1993).

Student retention is at least as much a function of institutional behavior as it is of student behavior (Tinto, 1987). Improving student retention not only fulfills the institutionally self-serving function of promoting fiscal solvency, it serves the more altruistic, student-centered purpose of promoting learning and development

(Levitz, 1993). Academic advising wields a strong impact on student retention. Kemerer (1985) has stated that practically every study of retention has shown that a well-developed advising program that has advisors who are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and like working with students is an important retention strategy and can often make a difference in a student persisting at an institution or leaving an institution.

Summary

Academic advising has been neither a highly desirable academic responsibility nor a highly rewarded one, whether done by faculty or professional advisors (Walsh, 1979). This has much to do with how it has been valued on community college campuses. Academic advising needs to be viewed by students, faculty, staff, and administrators as an activity that is central to student success. NACADA has dedicated its efforts to improving advising and advancing it as a profession and has certainly enhanced the professional standing and leadership opportunities for all advisors. The importance of advising as a means to connect faculty and staff with students and to engage students in educational goal setting was recognized as early as 1889 when Johns Hopkins University established an academic advising system (Frost, 2000).

While little can be done about what characteristics students have before they enter community colleges, a well-developed academic advising program that maximizes student integration within the academic and social systems of the institution will likely result in greater levels of retention. Academic advising remains the most significant mechanism available on most community college

campuses for academic success, satisfaction, and persistence. Developmental advising is an integral part of the academic mission of the institution; is student centered and concerned about the student's total educational development, and encourages students to share responsibility for advising (Frost, 1991). Developmental advising focuses on advising akin to teaching opposed to merely a registration process. It goes beyond exclusively giving information and signing forms. Academic advising has a significant function that is essential to the mission of community colleges. The question now is whether community college administrators are willing to recognize this invaluable role. Because an institution that values advising is committed to its mission and helping students to explore and synthesize academic, career and life goals.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research design, methodology, data collection strategies, and the data analysis process utilized in the study. The purposes of this study were: (a) to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges; (b) to explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors; and (c) to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice. The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

(1) How do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission?

(2) How do community college administrators, who supervise academic advisors, perceive academic advising relative to the institution's mission?

Research Paradigm

Due to the nature of the research problem, purposes of the study, questions guiding the study, and the desired end product, a qualitative research paradigm, designed within the interpretive case study methodology was selected. This method was best for this study because of the following reasons acknowledged by Merriam (1988): (a) "it offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon," (b) it is "anchored in real-life situations resulting in a rich and

holistic account of the phenomenon," (c) it can play "an important role in advancing the field's knowledge base," (d) "its strengths outweighs its limitations," (e) "it offers insights and illuminated meaning that expand it's readers' experiences," and (f) "educational processes, problems and programs could be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice" (p. 32).

Qualitative research is complementary to the intent and purpose of this study. Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 2001). In qualitative research the principal objective is to understand the meaning of an experience. Qualitative research strives to understand how all the parts work together to form a whole (Merriam, 1988). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that one of the major features of qualitative data is that it focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what "real life" is like. They note that qualitative data has an emphasis on peoples lived experiences and are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their perceptions. According to Merriam (1988),

> qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities – that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need

> of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. (p.17)

Qualitative research focuses on “the process” rather than on outcomes or products. It also focuses on meaning – how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, and how they structure their social worlds (Merriam, 1988). The key is in understanding from the participant’s perspective. Most qualitative research involves fieldwork. That is, physically going to the people, setting, or institution to become familiar with the phenomenon being studied. In qualitative research, descriptive words are the primary method used to illustrate what the researcher has learned about the phenomenon.

Additionally, the qualitative approach has ideological influences that reflect particular relationships of how power is distributed in a society. This perspective lends itself well to the conceptual framework of Critical Theory used in the study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2006), qualitative methods have been attractive to researchers studying the perspectives of people excluded from the mainstream because of the democratic emphasis of the method, the ease with which the method attends to the perspectives of those not traditionally included, and the strengths of the qualitative approach for describing the complexities of social conflict.

Research Design

Case Study

A case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group (Willis, 2007). According to Becker (1968) the purpose of a case study is to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study and to develop a general theoretical statement about regularities in social structure and process. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 1998). According to Willis (2007) the following entails advantages of using a case study: it allows the researcher to gather rich, detailed data in an authentic setting; it is holistic and thus supports the idea that much of what we can know about human behavior is best understood as lived experience in the social context and it can be done without predetermined hypotheses and goals (p.240).

Case study design can accommodate an array of disciplinary and philosophical perspectives. Case study research, and in particular qualitative case study, is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting educational phenomena (Merriam, 2001). Merriam (1988) believes that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education. Case studies are conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. This is the primary reason qualitative case study was chosen for this study.

Interpretive Case Study

The end product of a case study can be interpretive. Interpretive case studies gather and analyze descriptive data sources to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering (Willis, 2007). The purpose of interpretive research is to deeply understand a particular situation. An interpretive case study will be used in this study to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges. Interpretation refers to developing ideas about your findings and relating them to the literature and to broader concerns or concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). According to Bodgan and Biklen (2006) "the focus is on understanding the intricacies of a particular situation, setting, organization, culture, or individual, but that local understanding may be related to prevailing theories or models" (p. 243). Reflective discussions with experienced practitioners are viewed as prized sources of knowledge and understanding.

According to Willis (2007), interpretivists favor qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, and observations because those methods are better ways of getting at how humans interpret the world around them. The aim of interpretive case study is not to find the 'correct' or 'true' interpretation of the facts, but rather to eliminate erroneous conclusions so that one is left with the best possible, most compelling, interpretation (Merriam, 1988). Interpretive case studies use descriptive data to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering. According to Merriam (1988), a case study researcher gathers as much

information about the problem as possible with the intent of interpreting or theorizing about the phenomenon.

Participant and Institutional Selection Criteria

Purposeful sampling was used for this qualitative case study. According to Patton (2002), the term purposeful sampling implies selecting from a sample of participants from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Merriam (2001) suggests that purposive sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research and is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). All of the participants in this study were from community colleges in Illinois. Community colleges in Illinois were chosen because of their locale in relation to the researcher and because of the historical beginnings of community colleges in Illinois. In 1901, the first community college in the nation was established in Illinois, Joliet Junior College. Currently, Illinois is the third largest community college system in the nation (ICCB, 2007).

Participants for the study included eight professional academic advisors, and two community college administrators. Only professional academic advisors whose primary responsibility is advising students were selected. Faculty advisors and counselors were not selected for this study because a primary focus of the study was on roles and responsibilities of professional academic advisors. Faculty advisors' roles and responsibilities are totally different from professional academic advisors, because their primary responsibility is teaching.

The role and responsibilities of most counselors at community colleges also differ from that of professional academic advisors, in that, they are trained and most often licensed to provide professional counseling to students. Most professional academic advisors are not trained or licensed counselors.

Community college administrators that directly supervise academic advisors were chosen for the study. Administrators who directly supervise professional academic advisors were thought to be able to provide first-hand knowledge of how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges. These administrators have a good understanding of what academic advisors do on a daily basis. Also, these administrators have the capability of conveying to higher level administrators how academic advisors can play a vital role in achieving the goals established by the mission of the college and how academic advising can facilitate student success.

Three community colleges in Illinois were selected for the study because they specifically employ professional academic advisors where advising is their priority. Some Illinois community colleges only employ counselors who also provide academic advising services; these community colleges were not considered for the study. Some Illinois community colleges utilize both counselors and professional academic advisors with distinct job functions. Of the three Illinois community colleges that participated in the study, one had both professional academic advisors and counselors and the other two colleges did not have counselors at all, only professional academic advisors. For confidentiality purposes, hence forward when referring to the three participating

community colleges they will be referred to as community college A, B, and C. At community college A, two academic advisors and one administrator participated in individual interviews. At community college B, two academic advisors and one administrator also participated in individual interviews. At community college C, four academic advisors participated in a focus group (see Table 2). Age, gender, and ethnicity were not taken into consideration when selecting the individual participants.

Table 2

Participation of Illinois Community Colleges

	# of Advisors	# of Administrators	Carnegie Classification
Community College A	2	1	Large
Community College B	2	1	Medium
Community College C	4		Large

Note. Community colleges A and B utilized advisors and administrators for individual interviews only and community college C utilized advisors for a focus group only.

The other criterion used in selecting the participating Illinois community colleges was size. The researcher used size as a criterion to have institutions that are truly representative of most community colleges in Illinois. The Carnegie Foundation, a prominent, independent educational policy and research center, established size classifications for community colleges based solely on FTE (full-

time equivalent) enrollment. The foundation believes size matters because it is related to the institution's structure, complexity, culture, finances, and other important factors. The size classifications are: very small, small, medium, large, and very large (see Table 3). The majority of Illinois community colleges fall in the medium and large classification. There are no very small community colleges in Illinois and only one community college in Illinois is very large. The size classifications created by Carnegie were used to select one medium and one large Illinois community college to conduct the interviews, because majority of the community colleges in Illinois fall within these size classfications.

Table 3

Carnegie Size Classification for 2-year Colleges

VS2: Very Small 2-year. FTE data show enrollment of fewer than 500 students
S2: Small 2-year. FTE data show enrollment of 500 – 1,999 students
M2: Medium 2-year. FTE data show enrollment of 2,000 – 4,999 students
L2: Large 2-year. FTE data show enrollment of 5,000 – 9,999 students
VL2: Very Large 2-year. FTE data show enrollment of at least 10,000 students

Note. FTE= full-time equivalent for Fall

Initial research was conducted over the internet to determine which Illinois community colleges employed professional academic advisors. Once that was established, the researcher categorized those institutions by size using the

Carnegie classifications. The researcher randomly chose one large size institution and one medium size institution. Then the researcher contacted two advisors and the administrator responsible for supervising advisors at the large size institution and the medium size institution via-email to solicit their participation in the study. Once a response was received from all three potential participants (two advisors and an administrator) of the same institution, the researcher followed-up with a phone call to confirm interest and schedule interviews. The researcher was able to secure participation on the first attempt from both the medium and large size institutions randomly selected. The researcher traveled to the colleges to conduct the interviews. Each participant was sent an individual informed consent document outlining their rights as a participant (See Appendix A). A signed copy of the informed consent document was collected from each participant at the time of the interview.

Data Collection Strategies

The three qualitative methods of data collection used in the study were interviews, focus groups, and document analysis.

Interviews

Interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals (Merriam, 2002). According to Merriam (1988), in case study research of contemporary education, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews. An interview can be simply defined as a conversation with a purpose. Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around

them. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002). The interview allows us to enter into the other person's perspective. Willis (2007), states that the interview should capture some of the reality of the situation being studied and the goal of understanding how the person being interviewed thinks is at the center of the interview.

For the purpose of this study an open-ended, semi-structured format of interviewing was incorporated. Open-ended interviews consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words. Open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents. According to Patton (2002) the purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories. All six (four advisors and two administrators) of the individual interviews were person-to-person except for one, which was conducted over the phone. The one interview that was conducted over the phone was done so because it was more convenient for the participant due to a demanding and full work schedule.

In a semi-structured interview, certain information is desired from all respondents. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998). Prior to the first interview, an interview guide was

developed to list the questions and topics to be explored in the course of the interview. An interview guide was developed for academic advisors (see Appendix B) and administrators (see Appendix C). According to Patton (2002) a semi-structured interview guide (a) gathers information efficiently, (b) ensures a modicum of consistency and flexibility, (c) provides direction for the actual interview, and (d) allows for easier data analysis, and (e) provides an instrument capable of inspection. In essence, the interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed and provides topics within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject (Patton, 2002). The actual interviews with each academic advisor and administrator lasted approximately one and one half hour. This included time for probing, elaborating and clarifying answers to initial questions. All interviews were taped and transcribed by the researcher. The transcribed interviews were sent to the participants via email for clarification, elaboration and to ensure accuracy.

Focus Groups

A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) coined the term “focus group” to apply to a situation where the researcher asks very specific questions about a topic after having completed considerable research. Focus groups can serve a number of different purposes. For the purpose of this study, a focus group was used to get more depth and breadth relative to the implications of the data that was collected from the individual

interviews of academic advisors. The focus group was conducted with four academic advisors. The four focus group participants worked at the same Illinois community college, which was a different Illinois community college from the two Illinois community colleges that were used for the individual interviews of academic advisors. The researcher selected this particular community college because she knew one of the academic advisors that worked at the institution. The one academic advisor that the researcher knew was able to solicit participation from her colleagues. Each focus group participant signed a focus group informed consent document (see Appendix D). The focus group lasted approximately one and one half to two hours.

Focus groups typically involve bringing people of similar backgrounds or experiences to participate in a group interview about major issues that affect them (Patton, 2002). An interview guide is essential in conducting focus group interviews as it keeps the interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge (Patton, 2002). An interview guide was developed that listed the questions to be asked during the focus group (see Appendix E). Morgan (1988), states that a way to triangulate focus groups with individual interviews is to conduct the focus groups as follow-up interviews. This allows the researcher to explore issues that came up during the analysis of the interviews. Using both methods of focus groups and individual interviews contributes something unique to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study (Morgan, 1988).

Document Analysis

According to Merriam (2001) the use of documents in case study research is similar to the use of interviews. Documents can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam, 1988). Documents can be valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them, but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued through interviewing or direct observation (Patton, 2002). Many documents are free and easily accessible to the researcher. The documents analyzed in this study were the institutional mission statements of the Illinois community colleges used in the study, the academic advising department mission statements of the Illinois community colleges used in the study, and job descriptions of academic advisors at each Illinois community college used in the study.

Documents exists independently of the research agenda, unaffected by the research process, a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world. Since the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering data, he or she relies on skills and intuition to find and interpret data from documents (Merriam, 2001). Documents can be used to yield "better" data or more data than other data collection strategies. The data from documents can furnish very descriptive information relative to the research being conducted. Analysis of document data lends contextual richness and helps to ground an inquiry in the milieu of the researcher (Merriam, 2001). This grounding in real-world issues and day-to-day concerns is ultimately what the

naturalistic inquiry is working toward. Examining the mission statements of each college participating in the study and the job descriptions of the academic advisors participating in the study allowed the researcher to gain insight in identifying how academic advisors support the mission of community colleges, which was one of the purposes of the study.

As the literature states, there are multiple definitions of the community college mission. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher had to decide which definition of the community college mission would be used. Three concepts that remain universal across all definitions of the community college mission are affordability, accessibility, and community service. As mentioned earlier, Cohen and Brawer's (2003) definition of the community college mission was used to support the study. They define the community college mission by emphasizing what community colleges actually do in terms of services provided. Their definition describes the community college mission as student services, career education, developmental education, community education, and the collegiate functions (transfer and liberal arts).

After carefully analyzing the mission statements of Community College A and Community College B, similarities were very apparent. The mission statements of both participating institutions embodied the comprehensive mission of community colleges. Both institutional missions cite providing student learning opportunities as important, as well as providing programs and services to support student success. They also share some of the same key terms within their mission statements including diversity, affordability, and accessibility.

Each institution had its own academic advising mission statement as well. These mission statements also had some commonalities. One major parallel was the mentioning of assisting students in achieving their educational and personal goals. Both academic advising mission statements declared fulfilling its mission through transfer programs, career education, and community education; all of which Cohen and Brawer (2003) articulate in their definition of the community college mission. This validates the point that academic advisors perform a vital role in making it possible for the community college to accomplish its mission. There is a correlation between the community college mission and the job functions performed by academic advisors.

The researcher also analyzed the job descriptions of academic advisors at Community College A and Community College B. The job descriptions had four resonating duties that were required of the position at each college. The first duty was assisting students in developing an educational plan. The second duty was promoting and developing strategies for student success. The third duty was assisting students in transferring to four-year institutions. The fourth and final duty that was consistent in both job descriptions was the ability to work with a diverse, multicultural student population. One interesting job duty that was in the job description of academic advisors at Community College B was assisting with research and retention projects. These job descriptions further corroborate that there is a link between the community college mission and the job functions performed by academic advisors.

Trustworthiness

All research must respond to the canons of quality; criteria against which the trustworthiness of the study can be evaluated (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These canons raise questions such as, how credible are the findings of the study? And, how can we be sure that the findings reflect the participants and the inquiry itself rather than a fabrication from the researcher's biases or prejudices? Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this type of questioning as establishing the "truth value" of a study. Every systematic inquiry into human condition must address these issues (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that four factors be considered in establishing the trustworthiness for interpretive qualitative inquiry: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four constructs more accurately address the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm.

Credibility

Marshall and Rossman (1999) define credibility as demonstrating that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was appropriately identified and described. For this study credibility was assured through three methods: member checks, reflexivity, and triangulation of data sources. Member checking was conducted throughout the study. Member checks involve taking data derived from the participants back to them and asking if the data is correct. After the focus group and individual interviews were transcribed, they were sent back to the participants to confirm its accuracy. Reflexivity is the researcher's understandings of their influences, assumptions,

and biases of their research. Reflexivity requires a self-critical exploration of how and in what ways the researcher influence and shape the process and the outcomes. The researcher was aware of her biases and presumption throughout the entire research process and clarified her assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the onset of the study. Triangulation strengthened the study by combining different kinds of data sources. Data was collected from individual interviews, focus groups, and documents. Using multiple sources of data helped to confirm the findings. Overall, rigor in qualitative case study derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description (Merriam, 1988).

Transferability

Transferability, the second construct proposed by Lincoln and Guba is the extent to which other researchers can apply the findings of the study to their own study. The researcher should argue that his findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice (Merriam, 1988). However, the burden of demonstrating this transferability rests on the researcher who would make the transfer rather than with the original researcher. To make certain the applicability of the findings were useful to other situations under similar conditions, the researcher presented thick descriptions of the design and findings so that others would be able to decide how closely their situations match the researcher's situation, and consequently, whether the findings could be transferred. The researcher also made certain to select an

appropriate participant sample and justified choices and decisions regarding the study.

Dependability and Confirmability

The third and fourth constructs are dependability and confirmability. Dependability is when the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study and changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting (Merriam, 1988).

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed by others. To strengthen the dependability and confirmability of the study an audit trail was used. An audit trail is a documented record of steps taken during data collection and data analysis, whereby when used independently another person could come to similar conclusions using the techniques employed in the research. Another method used was written memos. The researcher wrote notes, reflective memos, thoughts, and insights during the entire research process. Overall, explicit choices, decisions and justifications of the research process contributed to making this a quality study.

Data Analysis Process

Data collection and data analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research. Data analysis is the process of making sense out of one's data (Merriam, 1988). Several levels of analysis and interpretation are possible in case study research. For the purpose of this study the data analysis process involved six phases described by Marshall and Rossman (1999): (a) organizing the data, (b) generating themes, (c) coding the data, (d) examining the emergent

understandings, (e) searching for alternative explanations and (f) writing the report (p.152).

Data that were collected from the individual interviews, focus groups and documents were systematically organized to make it more manageable for the analysis process. A careful examination of data for its usefulness and centrality was conducted. Generating themes involved looking for recurring regularities in the data and comparing one unit of information with the next. Much of the work involved in generating themes consists of a form of content analysis (Merriam, 1988). Through questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework, the researcher engages the ideas and the data in significant intellectual work (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The themes ultimately describe and interpret the data. Inductive and deductive analysis was used in interpreting the data. Inductive analysis was used through immersing in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships. Deductive analysis was used with a priori codes (marginalization, hegemony, and positionality) derived from the theoretical framework of Critical Theory. Patton (2002) describes the process of inductive analysis as discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data, in contrast with deductive analysis where the analytic categories are stipulated beforehand, according to an existing framework.

Units of Analysis Process

Qualitative research influenced by Critical Theory is interested in either how social values and organizations get reproduced in educational institutions, or how

people produce their choices and actions in society (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Also, Bodgan and Bilken (2006) suggest that those studies that emphasize reproduction examine how educational institutional sort, select, favor, disenfranchise, silence, or privilege particular groups of people. Those studies that emphasize production are interested in how people negotiate these reproductive structures, how they act as agents in their own lives, sometimes resisting discrimination or sometimes wending their way through the maze of restrictions (Bogdan &Biklen, 2006).

The relationship between academic advisors and community college administrators who supervise academic advisors was examined through the theoretical framework of Critical Theory. Critical Theory emphasizes dominating relationships that involve inequities and power. One of the goals of Critical Theory is to assist those without power by helping them to acquire it. It is hoped that the dominating relationship will ultimately become stable with truly democratic social arrangements. The study's conceptual framework is made up of three concepts found in Critical Theory. These three concepts were used as the units of analysis: marginalization, hegemony, and positionality. This analysis allowed for examining the perception academic advisors and administrators have about what the role and responsibilities of academic advisors are and should be.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings from this study are reported in three sections. The first section of findings is relative to the three concepts (marginalization, hegemony, and positionality) derived from Critical Theory, which were used as the units of analysis. These findings were generated from the individual interviews with academic advisors and administrators. All of the data in this section is representative of the individual interviews with academic advisors and the individual interviews with administrators that directly supervised academic advisors.

The second section of findings comes from the focus group, which was also analyzed using the three concepts of marginalization, hegemony, and positionality. The focus group was conducted after the individual interviews of academic advisors to gain more depth and breadth relative to the implications of the data analyzed from the individual interviews with academic advisors.

The third section of findings directly relates to the two research questions guiding the study. Participant replies were coded, analyzed, categorized, and interpreted. Responses from the individual interviews with academic advisors were classified into the following three emergent themes: Student Resource, Retention/Graduation Agent, and Professional Perception. Responses from the individual interviews with administrators were classified into the following five

emergent themes: Mission-Driven, Important Function, Mandatory Advising, Student-Centered, and Professional Development.

Purpose Statement

As stated previously, the purposes of this study were to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges; to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice; and to explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors.

Conceptual Framework

The three concepts embedded in the theoretical framework of Critical Theory that were used to analyze the data and present the findings of the study are marginalization, hegemony, and positionality. These three concepts were chosen to analyze the data, because the researcher felt these concepts would provide the best analysis relative to the research questions guiding the study. The researcher was looking for insight and understanding of how academic advisors and administrators perceive the role and responsibilities of academic advisors relative to the institutional mission of community colleges.

Marginalization

Marginalization deals with the negative treatment of individuals or groups because of some characteristic, which results in singling out the individual or group by the larger society. When analyzing the data for examples of marginalization, the researcher was looking for statements from academic advisors about how administrators treat them and view their role. The researcher

was also looking for statements from the administrators about how they viewed and treated academic advisors. In general, the researcher wanted to develop a better understanding of the relationship between academic advisors and administrators.

All four of the advisors that were individually interviewed in this study felt that the administrator that directly supervised them valued their role as advisors and understood the importance of the advisors' role. For example, one of the advisors stated,

> "I can honestly say that the administration here definitely sees our role as important."

Another advisor added,

> "For the most part, administrators are very supportive of the advising department and we see it through the different rewards they give us during the year."

The advisors also believed their immediate supervisor understood the importance of their role in relation to student success and retention. As one advisor explained,

> "I think the administration value our job because they know this is one of the key departments that from here the students move on and decide whether they want to register or not."

The advisors did not believe their immediate supervisor denied them from participating in meaningful functions that contributed to the success of the college. The advisors were actually encouraged to participate in activities outside of the advising office. For instance, one of the advisors stated,

> "I know the administration value us, just the fact that we are asked to participate and contribute to different committees, different meetings and seminars and things they put together when they're discussing how to make the college better."

The responses from the two administrators were also analyzed to look for evidence of marginalization. It appeared that the two administrators who were individually interviewed believed that the role academic advisors play at their respective institutions was invaluable. They also felt they had a good working relationship with the academic advisors they directly supervised. However, as the administrator from Community College B voiced, "this was not always the case." The administrator discussed how when she first arrived at the institution, divergent views were apparent between her and the academic advisors regarding the role and responsibilities of academic advisors. The administrator explained,

> "The mindset of academic advisors when I first got here was very much like, I just need to help my students get some classes and show them this worksheet of what it takes to get an Associate degree."

This administrator could not believe that the academic advisors did not have an understanding of community college students and were not compassionate about their needs. The administrator stated,

> "There was also a lot of talk about, well gosh, I can't believe this student came in underprepared or I can't believe this student didn't know what classes they needed to take."

The academic advisors at Community College B, according to this administrator, were once not aware of how they had an impact on student success. The administrator believed that since she's been supervising the advisors that the advisors have come to realize how valuable they are to students and the institution. The administrator explained,

> "I think we have moved very far to a much better understanding of how advisors can better help students. So, some of the staff I think in the beginning was a little resistant, because they saw their role as, I'm just helping the student pick some classes and in my eyes it is much more than that."

It appeared that the administrator from Community College B was very passionate about academic advising and the positive impact advising has on students. What frustrated her most was that the academic advisors she supervised did not have that same passion and understanding of how they played an important role in student success. She made it clear that under her guidance and supervision, the academic advisors now have a very different attitude about their role and responsibilities. She went on to discuss how she views the role of academic advisors,

> "The roles of academic advisors assist in achieving the goals established by the mission of the college and there was not an understanding of that link a few years back, but there is now. What we've done is made it clear to our staff that these are our students and this is the kind of assistance we need to offer our students to be successful."

The administrator at Community College A also felt strongly about the role and responsibilities of academic advisors. She believed academic advising was

not valued on the campus and therefore it was her responsibility and the responsibility of the advisors to demonstrate how academic advising assists in supporting the mission of the college. She had this to say about the role of academic advisors on her campus,

> "Academic advisors work on committees to help elevate our relationship with people outside this office and they also help with the professional development goals that we have to elevate advising as a profession here on campus."

The administrator went on to discuss her role as it relates to her relationship with academic advisors as their immediate supervisor,

> "My mission as their supervisor is to help them develop professionally. I developed an inventory when I first got here to ask them what I could do for them to help them identify what areas they would like to grow in professionally, so I do try to be conscious of their needs, the schools needs, and the student's needs."

For the most part, marginalization proved not to be a factor when looking at the relationship between academic advisors and the administrators who directly supervise them. The administrator from Community College B discussed how the relationship between her and the academic advisors she supervised was rocky in the beginning, but now they all are on the same page. Analyzing the data for verification of marginalization did provide insight on how administrators perceive academic advising, which pertains to one of the research questions guiding the study.

Evidence of marginalization did however emerge from the data in a different relationship. At Community College A, there was some confirmation of marginalization between the administrator that directly supervised the academic advisors, the academic advisors themselves and higher-level administration. The administrator and the two academic advisors at Community College A had a strong discontent for higher-level administration. The administrator was very frustrated about the fact that her actual title was not that of an Assistant Dean or Dean and felt this was a limitation to her role as an administrator. She believed she was denied certain access to administrative functions that other administrators on campus received, which in turn impeded her role as an administrator. The administrator had this to say,

> "It makes no sense that I have twenty-two people that report to me and I can't be apart of meetings where the goal is to focus on the future direction and planning of the college. I hear everything second hand or third hand sometimes. I don't even have an Assistant; with the largest staff on campus I need an Assistant. My own secretary is only part-time, but again I have the largest staff on campus."

As a whole, the two academic advisors and the academic advisor's immediate supervisor at Community College A expressed a strong dissatisfaction of higher-level administration, especially for not mandating academic advising for all first-time, full-time students. One of the advisors stated this about higher-level administration,

> "I'm not sure if higher administration value advising as much as they should. It has never been shared

> with me, but I can tell by the resources we have that advising is not valued. I'm not sure they realize that advising is the most important first stop that the student makes."

Both of the advisors and the advising administrator believed that advising should be mandatory for all first-time, full-time students. They felt that higher-level administration should make it a policy for all first-time, full-time students to see an academic advisors. The other advisor stated this about higher-level administration,

> "I'm not really sure if advising is viewed by higher administration as a vital function in retaining students, if it was viewed as such a thing it would be mandatory and it isn't. Mandatory advising could really help students. You know its things like that- that administrators could put in place to allow us to better serve our students."

The advising administrator felt that academic advising was not given the proper attention on campus by higher-level administration that it should. She believed that academic advising was perceived negatively by higher-level administration. The administrator had this to say about higher-level administration,

> "Higher administration absolutely does not view academic advising as being integral in the success of the college. All the deficiencies and all the limitations of my role are mainly because advising is not respected at this institution."

The administrator proceeded to discuss the importance of requiring academic advising for all first-time, full-time students and concluded by stating,

> "I would find some way to make sure that the wait

to see an academic advisor was less than an hour."

Hegemony

Hegemony was also used to analyze the data in assessing the relationship between academic advisors and their immediate supervisor. Hegemony materializes when dominant groups maintain their dominant position over another group through formalized power. The dominant groups presumed in this study are the administrators who directly supervise academic advisors. Hegemony also controls the way new ideas are rejected through the exclusion of others in the process. This concept did not reveal itself in the data; what materialized was actually the exact opposite, which can be called anti-hegemony. For example at Community College A, one of the advisors had this to say about his immediate supervisor,

> "Our administrator values our input and asks us to participate in decision-making processes."

The administrators interviewed in this study did not appear to use their authority in a dominating manner. Their approach was more open and inclusive. Both administrators from Community College A and Community College B discussed the importance of professional development opportunities for the academic advisors. At Community College A, the academic advising department actually partakes in professional development on a weekly basis. The administrator at Community College A explained,

> "For two-hours a week at least we can get people together to learn. It's like you capture them [advisors] and you want to take every possible

> minute to teach them and train them on anything that possibly has changed, program updates and that type of thing."

The same administrator conversed about how academic advisors assist in developing relationships throughout the campus and assist in promoting academic advising as a profession on the campus, because she believed academic advising was not considered by most faculty, staff, and administrators as a valuable function on the campus.

The academic advisors at Community College B expressed satisfaction with the way their ideas were received by administrators. One advisor at Community College B discussed how she was delighted that administration embraced her ideas. This is what she had to say,

> "Administration really supports our department and in fact, right now I'm working on a student orientation and there are things I would like to implement that have not happened here, so my ideas are being welcomed, encouraged, and supported. So, I like the idea that they have allowed me to take the lead on this orientation project that I'm working on."

Both advisors at Community College B felt that their immediate supervisor provided them with important information relative to the future direction of the college and made sure that they stayed abreast of any changes or developments in the college. One of advisors shared this about her immediate supervisor,

> "I feel that in our staff meetings our boss does a really good job of letting us know what's going on in the college. I feel confident that when she goes to meetings, she comes back and tells us exactly how

> things are running; she just shares the information with us."

The advisors at Community College A and Community College B did not feel that their immediate supervisor used their power and authority in any way that was unfavorable. When the advisors had new and innovative ideas, their ideas were welcomed by their supervisor. The administrators, as much as possible, included the advisors in certain decision-making processes and encouraged professional development opportunities. The administrators appeared to have the advisor's best interest at hand.

Positionality

Positionality ultimately describes how people are defined. One of the purposes of this study was to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges. Positionality within this study was used to gain insight into how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators that supervise academic advisors and how it is perceived by academic advisors themselves. It is imperative that those directly responsible for academic advising recognize its value on the community college campus in order to understand how it assists in achieving the mission of the college and how it can facilitate student success and retention.

All four of the advisors interviewed believed they played a part in assisting the institution in being successful because they assisted students in being successful. Each of the advisors was asked during their interview, do you believe the job functions you perform are critical to the success of your

institution? This is how one of the advisors at Community College B answered the question,

> "I think so; I work closely with athletes and the athletic department and for athletes they have to be full-time students and maintain a good G.P.A. I coordinate a program called early alert for our student athletes to keep them in good academic standing and this program takes a lot of work. At the same time, I still have to assist students in the general population. So yeah, I think my job here and my efforts and my passion are critical to the success of the institution, so I have to give myself some credit."

The reason this question was asked, was to gauge how the academic advisors perceived their role. All four of the advisors had a good understanding of how their role played a major part in student success. Another advisor answered the same question by stating,

> "Yes, I know that there are many students I've helped. I think as an academic advisor you truly make a difference in somebody's life; I honestly believe that and I've seen the proof of it."

According to the literature, one of the ways academic advisors assist students in being successful is by helping them develop an educational plan. One of the advisors from Community College A understands this and answered the question by saying,

> "Absolutely, and I don't just say that because it's my job. We contribute to helping students with a game plan, a plan of study. One of the big things I'm working on now is undecided students, which I think is one of the hardest student populations for an advisor to work with. So, I have to keep them on track and guide them through this process."

Each academic advisor was also asked the question, what are characteristics of a good academic advisor? Three out of the four advisors said an effective communicator. This is what one of the advisors said,

> "I think a good academic advisor has to be a good listener; we're not here to impose a program, we're here to inform students of their options."

The advisors understood that community colleges are open door institutions and most have a diverse student population, which means that advisors have to be flexible and start where the student is. Another advisor answered by stating,

> "I think you have to be able to communicate with a variety of people."

A different advisor said,

> "A good communicator, mentor, and teacher. I believe advising is teaching; we should not prescribe, but we should teach, so that a student at a certain point can do it themselves. Now of course inherent in the community college population is a certain type of student that may need a little more support and mentoring than others."

Some of the other characteristics advisors mentioned included: problem solver, being knowledgeable, having a desire to do advising, being able to connect with students, and being empathetic and understand that you're dealing with people's lives.

Both administrators viewed academic advising as being an integral function on campus that assisted in student success. They felt that advising was an invaluable function. They both said that their departments were student-oriented

and that they always put the students first. The administrator from Community College A felt so sincere about the importance of academic advising that she advocated for it to be mandatory for all new students on her campus. This administrator was once an advisor and still considered herself an advisor; this is what she had to say about academic advising,

> "I think we need to be welcoming with open arms to every student that comes in here, no matter what their background is, what their learning level is, that might be different than what we might be comfortable with, so that's the advisor's role. I've had students who come to see me, because I'm an advisor and not a counselor. It may be very clear that they might have counseling issues, but as an advisor they might find us more approachable, so I can't express enough the importance of academic advising."

The same administrator discussed how she steps up to the plate when needed and assist her advisors in the trenches. She stated,

> "During peak times when we're busy, I'm advising and I swear I don't mind because I consider myself a better advisor than manager sometimes."

Overall, both administrators thought very highly of academic advising and its significance in facilitating student success.

For this study, Critical Theory was the intellectual paradigm that was used as the primary construct for analysis and interpretation of the data. Marginalization, hegemony, and positionality are three salient concepts embedded in Critical Theory that were used to gather information relative to the research questions

guiding the study and to deepen understanding of the relationship between administrators and academic advisors.

This study assumed that the relationship between academic advisors and administrators that directly supervised academic advisors would be negatively based on power. However, it was found that administrators did not use their power to marginalize academic advisors. What the study demonstrated was that not all power relationships have to be negative. This is exactly what critical theorist strives for in society; a more democratic world. Critical theorist believes that there needs to be a shift in power relationships, whereby those without power acquire it. Academic advisors defined their role as being essential as it relates to fulfilling the mission of the college.

Focus Group Findings

A focus group was conducted with four academic advisors that worked at the same community college (Community College C). These academic advisors did not participate in the individual interviews of academic advisors. The focus group was used as a follow-up interview to acquire more insight relative to the data that was collected from the individual interviews of academic advisors. The focus group allowed the researcher to explore issues that arose during the analysis of the individual interviews with academic advisors.

Of the three concepts derived from Critical Theory to analyze the data, marginalization appeared to be the one concept from the researcher's analysis that heavily resonated from the focus group. Ironically, marginalization was a

concept that did not reveal itself from the data of the individual interviews of academic advisors.

Marginalization

Marginalization emerged when the focus group participants from Community College C spoke about their relationship with administrators and surprisingly when talking about their relationship with faculty. The academic advisors in the focus group all agreed that they were not valued at their institution. They believed that their job functions are viewed by faculty as meaningless and simply a registration function. At their institution faculty members also serve as advisors during the registration process and according to the advisors in the focus group, most faculty members despise this role. One of the advisors from the focus group had this to say,

> "I think during registration we get a taste of what it would be like to not have advisors just by seeing what happens to students when they see faculty. There are mistakes and students get registered in wrong classes. I think we are really underappreciated and faculty don't seem to want to step up in their advising role. So, we play a critical role and I don't think we are appreciated. There are just so many things that we do and I don't think administration realize that."

The advisors dialogued about their immediate supervisor and were frustrated that their immediate supervisor did not understand their role and responsibilities as academic advisors. The administrator came from another department on campus and had only been the advisor's supervisor for a little over a year, with no prior experience in advising. The advisors made it clear that they were not

satisfied with their supervisor's performance. This is what one of the advisors had to say,

> "We've never had an administrator who has had a vision for our department or had a vision for the talents that are truly in the Advising Office. Top administrators are not with us on a day-to-day basis, so a lot of what they know is in theory, not what we need to be successful or even to be perceived differently on campus. We don't have an administrator that knows the depth of what goes into advising a student, they're just looking to bring in numbers, but they don't support us. So I think the biggest problem is that we don't have anyone who can speak to those top administrators and say this is what we need and why and who can give solid examples of where we are and where we need to be."

Another advisor spoke about how valuable academic advisors are to the institution and how at their institution higher-level administration does not have a clue about their value and worth. This is what the advisor had to say

> "I believe that sometimes higher-level administrators don't understand the value of academic advisors because most times when they give out kudos they only speak to faculty. They don't understand that advisors are the ones that make sure that our students get registered properly into classes. Administrators tend to think of advisors as not as valuable as faculty, but what they don't realize is in order for most students to be successful and graduate they need to see an advisor regularly.

One other advisor spoke about her experience in being a fairly new advisor and could tell that academic advisors and the advising function were not valued on campus. This particular advisor also taught part-time on campus and felt she was treated better by faculty members only because she taught part-time. This is what she had to say,

> "I've only been here for a short time, but during my year and a half here many things have told me where advisors are placed in the hierarchy here. When I was first interviewed, I was interviewed by a higher-level administrator and basically he told me if you're here after five years in the advising office there's a problem. He said this is entry level and your goal should be to move up. I get more kudos for being an adjunct faculty than I do for my day job as an advisor, which I'm proud of. I think even faculty look at you differently if you teach, it's interesting."

Another advisor summed up the relationship between advisors and administrators at their institution by stating,

> "Our immediate supervisors, they don't understand the functions of an academic advisor because they don't know what we do. In order for them to walk in our shoes they must be able to know what we do. Most administrators in this college don't understand, even faculty look down on us. So I think we are not thought of as being valuable by administrators and one of the reasons is because they lack the knowledge about what we truly do."

The academic advisors at Community College C had a very different perspective than the academic advisors at Community College A and Community College B regarding the administration at their college. The advisors at Community College C overwhelmingly felt that their immediate supervisor did not fully understand the role of academic advisors. At Community College C, the researcher only conducted a focus group with four academic advisors to gain more insight relative to the data that was collected from the individual interviews with academic advisors; the academic advisor's immediate supervisor was not interviewed.

Research Questions

Two research questions were developed to guide the direction of the study. The actual interview questions for academic advisors and administrators were established from the research questions to assist in gaining a better understanding of the phenomena being studied. There were two sets of interview questions, one set of interview questions were developed exclusively for the administrators that were interviewed and the other set of interview questions were developed exclusively for the academic advisors interviewed (see Appendix B and C).

As for the two research questions guiding the study, one of the research questions was specifically related to administrators and the other research question was specifically related to academic advisors. Both research questions were intended to obtain information relevant to the purpose of the study. The following is a review of the findings based on the two research questions guiding the study.

Responses from academic advisors aimed at answering the first research question was classified into four emergent themes. The themes were created from two separate data sources; the individual interviews with academic advisors and the focus group with academic advisors. The themes are: Student Resource, Retention/Graduation Agent, and Professional Perception.

Research Question One

How do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission? This was the first research question that guided the study. After carefully analyzing the data from the individual interviews with academic advisors, the focus group data with academic advisors and constantly reviewing the first research question, three themes emerged from the data: Student Resource, Retention/Graduation Agent, and Professional Perception.

Student resource. The academic advisors felt that they were the "go to people" on campus for students. They believed they served as the primary resource for students in all facets. The advisors also felt there were some essential implicit tasks involved in what they do on a daily basis. The following responses from academic advisors support the emergent theme, Student Resource:

> We are the first department that students come to if they want information about anything.
>
> We are a one-stop shop.
>
> If we don't know the answer we'll get you to where you need to be. We know a little bit about everything and if we think we need to refer a student somewhere else, that's what we do.

The advisors described in detail some of the tasks they perform to support students. The advisors believed that they should be and are the point of contact for students. The subsequent responses also speak to the Student Resource theme.

> We do perspective student workshops and new student orientations; we are really the first people that a lot of the time students see when they come to the college.

> We do academic planning, motivate students, and refer them to the counseling department and find other ways to help them.

Often times community college students are first generation college students and because the advisors were aware of this, they understood that they sometimes needed to start with the basics for students. There were also some general principles the advisors had about their role in relation to students.

> Putting students central is important in everything we do.

> Education of the whole person is really the mission of academic advising.

> A lot of times what I need to do is give students an overview of the college, what is a credit, what is a syllabus, what degrees we offer.

The following responses were provided by the focus group participants. The academic advisors that participated in the focus group believed that, in order to best serve the students, the advisor needed to know about every department, program and support service available to students. The advisors also discussed how they had to provide assistance to students when students did not have a clear plan for achieving their goals. These responses from the academic advisors in the focus group also correspond with the Student Resource theme:

> "Academic advising is one of the only departments that has to have knowledge about what's going on throughout the college. Most of the people employed in the college are departmentalized; they only know what's going on in their department. In order to be an academic advisor you must have knowledge of the entire college; the curriculum, degree requirements, what to do if your student has a problem, whether it's academic or personal. We must understand all the resources the college offers in order to provide good academic advising to our students."

> "From first glance advising can look easy, but there really is a lot of forethought that goes into advising. We really have to think for our students, I think they see their goal, but attaining it is sometimes something that they really haven't thought out and so we almost have to think that out for them and imagine having to do that for every student that comes through the door. Each student's situation is just as important as the next, so when we have a room of two hundred students, I have to show the same amount of attention, seriousness and respect to every student that I see because this is serious, this is a life impacting journey."

Retention/graduation agent. The advisors felt they played a role in retaining students and assisting them in graduating. One of the purposes of this study was to explore how academic advisors play a role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice. Retention is fundamental to the community college mission and the advisors appeared to have knowledge of this. The following responses from academic advisors support the emergent theme, Retention/Graduation Agent:

> As advisors we assist in retaining, graduating, and matriculating students.

> Of course teachers are the ones who provide students that foundation with composition and math, but advisors are the ones who help students do it in a reasonable time fashion, keep them on track, and keep them from taking unnecessary courses.

The advisors understood the value of students actively participating in the academic advising process. They knew that they could influence, encourage, and motivate students to persist in college. These responses also speak to the Retention/Graduation theme:

> I believe we could play a much bigger role in retention and graduation rates if we required advising.

> This is one of the key departments that from here the students move on and decide whether they want to stay and register or not.

The advisors realize that if students can connect with a concerned member of the college that the likelihood of students being successful is greater. The following responses were taken from the focus group participants. These responses correspond with the Retention/Graduation Agent theme:

> "One of the main reasons advisors are essential to retention is because students have an opportunity to connect with someone and have a personal relationship with an advisor, which also helps assist them in their academic endeavor. Also, they have someone who can be their adversary while their in college. It has been proven that students who see an academic advisor spend less time in college than students who do not."

The advisors discussed some of the tasks they conduct in preparing students to graduate. They also talked about how they contribute to retention in the responses below:

> "We conduct a pre-graduation workshops where students have a chance to get a snapshot of where they are and some advisement on the spot so they'll know exactly what they need to do to complete their degree once they leave. So, I definitely think that speaks to our efforts with retention and graduation rates."

> "I think one of the reasons advisors contribute to retention is that we are actually the first line for students when they're admitted to the college. For me that is one of the best things about being an advisor, you get to learn so much about other areas of the college, because a lot of times you find yourself counseling students about financial aid, tutoring, and just about all the other areas of the college, which contributes to retention. So, I think we play a big role in retention."

Professional perception. For the most part, academic advisors viewed themselves as professionals and academic advising as a profession. They understood the importance of their job functions and how they assisted in supporting the mission of the college. The following responses support the emergent theme, Professional Perception:

> I see the importance in what I do, you know I actually believe in what I'm doing; I think that's important because this is a career for me, this isn't just a job. I do see validity in what I do, I believe in what I do.

> I view academic advising as a profession; this is a

career for me.

I believe the job functions I perform are critical to the success of the institution.

The advisors in the focus perceived their role to be of value to the institution and to students. They held themselves in high regard and voiced how important they felt their role is. The responses below correlate with the Professional Perception theme:

I believe advising is teaching.

I think I'm instrumental as an advisor, because I'm the "go to person" for the student.

I love being an advisor, I love talking to students and showing them that there is a way for you to get a college education, so I love that aspect of being an advisor.

The following responses were provided by the focus group participants. The advisors had a dialogue about how they perceive their role relative to the mission of the college. These responses correspond with the Professional Perception theme:

"I believe the role of an academic advisor is one of the most essential parts of the mission of the college, because we do provide educational guidance and support for our students in order for them to be able to successfully matriculate their way from here to a four-year college or a career, so academic advising is essential to the mission of the college."

"Well we're definitely a constant presence in students lives. I mean we're here at the beginning when they first walk in the door; we're here throughout their stay, we're here as they're exiting, when they're going to

> graduate or if they're going to transfer, so we do definitely support the part of the mission that states we provide liberal arts and career education."

> "I think the part of our mission that resonates with me the most is in providing affordable opportunities for academic, career and personal advancement. I feel like so many students come to us and they don't have the road map. They know they want a degree, but they don't know how to get there, so advising is an important piece because it provides that road map and as advisors we're always connecting students to resources on campus that can make their educational career more beneficial."

Summary. Four academic advisors, two from Community College A and two from Community College B were interviewed. A focus group of four academic advisors from Community College C was also conducted. The three themes, Student Resource, Retention/Graduation Agent and Professional Perception that were generated from the data, served to respond to the first research question guiding the study, which was how do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission?

In general, all the advisors recognized the importance of their position in relation to the mission of the college, student success and retention. They understood how they played a role in retaining and graduating students. They affirmed that they serve as a primary resource for students and they all view academic advising as a profession and believe they are making a difference in student's lives. The advisors also feel they are student-centered; meaning everything they do is in the best interest of the students.

Research Question Two

How do community college administrators, who supervise academic advisors, perceive academic advising relative to the institution's mission? Responses from the two administrators interviewed aimed at answering the second research question was classified into five emergent themes. The themes created from the analysis of interviews with administrators were: Mission-Driven, Important Function, Mandatory Advising, Student-Centered, and Professional Development.

Mission-driven. Each administrator felt that academic advising was a direct manifestation of the institution's mission. Community College A and Community College B both had mission statements for their academic advising department. The administrators viewed academic advising as a function that was directly tied to accomplishing the mission of the college. The following responses narrate the emergent theme, Mission-Driven. The administrator from Community College B stated,

> As a community college, we have a comprehensive mission and we have obviously a commitment to access, to serving our community and to serving all students in any capacity; making sure that we meet the need of our community. Academic advising directly ties to that and what I would say as an administrator of this community college is, everything is done and guided from the mission; whether it is new initiatives or even how certain departments are run, particularly academic advising.

The administrator from Community College A confirmed that the academic advising mission and the institutional mission of the college are interconnected. Her response is below,

> Everything we do in advising is guided in essence by the institutional mission; there are common themes and common elements that cross both the academic advising mission and the institutional mission. Our academic advising mission is in a nutshell to cultivate and guide the student body with achieving academic goals whether they are to enhance professional development, foster lifelong learning or even acquire new skills and that is very much apart of the mission of the college as well.

Important function. Both administrators felt that academic advising was an integral function within the college. One of the administrators spoke about academic advising in relation to successfully assisting in student retention and matriculation. The responses below support the emergent theme, Important Function:

> I think academic advising is one of the most important functions on campus because if nothing else students tend to want to see an advisor first.

> We need to look at retention and see how advising across the country helps in retention and transferability to four-year institutions. Advisors are a key element in most institutions, so we need to actually put that in reports and show proof of that, something I have not had the opportunity to do because I'm too busy.

> I can't express enough the importance of academic advising.

Mandatory advising. The administrator at Community College A, which happened to be the larger of the two institutions, felt that academic advising was so important that it needed to be mandatory. She knew that it would be a huge undertaking because of the student to advisor ratio, but thought that at least every full-time, first-time student needed to regularly see an academic advisor. The following responses also support the emergent theme, Important Function:

> Advising isn't mandatory, so that's a huge issue.
>
> Mandatory advising would show the students that it's important; I mean they don't know what they're missing.
>
> Mandatory advising would elevate the respect for the office, which would really change a lot.

Student-centered. Both administrators believed the primary purpose of academic advising is to focus on the student's academic and career goals. Each administrator discussed putting students' central in all that they do. The following responses support the emergent theme, Student-Centered:

> Our goal is to meet with the students, assess their goals, their needs and assist them in getting where they want to be.
>
> Our ultimate goal is to get the student graduated and go on to whatever goals they may have.
>
> Every single student that comes in we try to give one-on-one services to and we try to assist them in identifying and achieving their goals.

The administrators recognize that the academic advisors do much more than just advise students. They understood that there's a lot that goes into helping students be successful during and after their tenure at the college. The responses below also support the Student-Centered theme:

> As an academic advisor you are doing a lot more than just guiding someone's academic plan, although that is a big piece of it, it is also understanding the student holistically and understanding who community college students are; there is a lot that is happening in the way of I guess social work if you will and we spend a lot of time making sure that when advisors are meeting one-on-one with the students that they are looking at the student holistically.

> We try to foster a lifelong learning mentality; promote lifelong learning and develop students into a global environment.

> The advisor's role is to listen to the student, get to know the student, but also be able to guide them as best as they can to whatever that student is wanting whether it's a certificate, a degree, to transfer or whatever it is, they need to be able to assist that student in getting from A to B.

Professional development. The administrators stressed the importance of continued professional development for academic advisors. As mentioned earlier, the academic advisors at Community College A engage in professional development once a week. The advisors themselves actually do the planning for the professional development. This would not occur if they did not have the support of their supervisor. The responses below are in correlation with the Professional Development theme:

> The advisors here need to understand that they definitely play a big role in not only helping students achieve their academic goals, but in many cases they are really helping students set the tone for their future. I think through professional development opportunities, advisors are beginning to understand that.

> Our advisors have quite a challenge because they need to be in tuned with the community in terms of cultural differences, they need to also understand that a lot of the students we're serving come under-prepared for college and do not understand the college process and don't really have mentors or family members that are able to show them the ropes sort of speak.

The administrator from Community College B felt that in order to fulfill the community college mission, advisors have to have a basic understanding of the type of students they serve. This administrator believes she is playing a crucial role in providing professional development opportunities for the academic advisors she supervises. The following responses support the emergent theme Professional Development:

> What you have are advisors that are committed to students, but at the same time need to continue professional development, so that's where I come in as an administrator to make sure that our staff understands our students and who they are, they need to understand what they bring with them through the door culturally, academically or understand how to be empathetic to individuals and any life experiences they may have prior to walking through our doors.

> If you don't have a basic understanding of who it is you're working with, then you can not be successful nor are you going to be successful in helping that student be successful. Again, education and getting

> the student to fulfill their academic goals is front and center in terms of what I see advisors doing here particularly at this community college, but I also feel it is very important to understand where the student is coming from and understand that students have a lot of obstacles.

Summary. Two administrators from two different community colleges in Illinois were interviewed. Each administrator directly supervised academic advisors at their respective institutions. Both administrators felt that academic advising was a valuable function and extremely important. In terms of the community college mission, the administrators had a good understanding of how academic advising played an integral role in fulfilling the mission of the college. Each college had an academic advising mission statement, which was directly related to the institution's mission statement. One administrator felt so strongly about the significance of academic advising on student success that she wanted to make it mandatory for every student. Overall, both administrators perceived academic advising as integral in supporting the mission of community colleges and affirmed that academic advising is a key function linked to achieving the mission of community colleges.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purposes of this study were to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges; to explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors; and to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice. The research questions guiding the study were: (1) How do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission? and (2) How do community college administrators, who supervise academic advisors, perceive academic advising relative to the institution's mission?

Organization of the Study

This study was organized in five chapters. Chapter one provided an introduction to the study, which included a statement of the problem, the purposes of the study, research questions guiding the study, the significance of the study, background and overview of the problem, and the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. Chapter two reviewed the literature that was pertinent to the phenomenon under study. Chapter three described the research design, methodology, and data collection strategies utilized in the study. Chapter four presented the findings of the study. Chapter five summarized the study's findings, discussed recommendations for practice and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The following summarizes the findings relevant to the research questions guiding the study. This study was designed in an effort to answer the two research questions guiding the study. Documents, individual interviews with professional academic advisors, and a focus group with professional academic advisors served as the strategy for collecting data to answer the research questions. In analyzing the data collected, pertinent to the first research questions, four emergent themes transpired. The first research question was, how do academic advisors perceive their role relative to the community college mission?

The mission of the college communicates to the public what the college views as important, its values, and its beliefs. The mission has the ability to influence policies and procedures used to make decisions about academic advising. In order to comprehend the mission of the two institutions used in the study, the researcher conducted a document analysis of the two institutional mission statements utilized in the study. What was discovered is that based on the mission of these two institutions, there is a relationship between the community college mission and the job functions performed by academic advisors.

It is important for academic advisors to understand how their role and responsibilities support the institutional mission of the college. In answering the first research question, the researcher classified the responses of the four academic advisors that were interviewed into four recurring categories: Student Resource, Retention/Graduation Agent, Foundational Tasks, and Professional

Perception. These four categories represent how academic advisors viewed their role and responsibilities relative to the community college mission.

The academic advisors viewed themselves as a resource to students. They believed they were the individuals on campus that students could come to for any issue or concern, academic or personal because they were knowledgeable of all the campus resources, knew the requirements for the different programs and degrees offered at the college, and were familiar with the institution's academic policies and procedures. The advisors interviewed also believed they played a role in retaining and graduating students. They believed the relationships they build with students assist in students persisting at the college and ultimately graduating. The advisors thought there were some inherent functions to their role and responsibilities, such as being student-centered, developing the "whole" student, and providing basic information to students, especially first generation college students. Lastly, advisors viewed themselves as professionals and their role and responsibilities as providing a critical function to the success of the institution.

The second research question was how do community college administrators, who supervise academic advisors, perceive academic advising relative to the institution's mission? Two administrators that directly supervise academic advisor at two separate institutions were interviewed. In answering the second research question, the researcher classified the responses of the two administrators that were interviewed into the following five recurring categories: Mission-Driven, Important Function, Mandatory Advising, Student Centered, and

Professional Development. Both administrators viewed academic advising as being directly linked to the institution's mission and as one of the most important functions on the campus. One of the administrators was so passionate about the importance of academic advising that she wanted to make it mandatory for all new students, new to college. Both administrators saw academic advising as being student centered. Meaning academic advisor's primary responsibility was focusing on the needs of students. One of the administrators also believed that in order for academic advising to truly be representative of the community college mission that advisors had to be engaged in continued professional development opportunities.

Limitations to the Study

Overall, this study sought out to identify how the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors support the mission of community colleges; explore how academic advising is perceived by academic advisors and administrators; and explore how academic advising assists in retention. It is believed that this research was successful in all its attempts; however, no research study is without limitations.

For the purposes of this study, limitations are those things which were beyond the researcher's control. One limitation to this study that was beyond the researcher's control was in providing limited information about the institutions that participated in the study because of confidentiality purposes. Providing too much information about the institutions could have jeopardized confidentiality. Some of the information that could have been disclosed regarding the institutions

was their exact location, a description of the student body makeup, the institution's mission verbatim, and more detailed description of the academic advising offices at the institutions.

Another limitation to the study that was beyond the researcher's control was reflected upon in the design of the study regarding the limited accessibility in the participant and institutional selection criteria. The participant selection criteria required participants to be professional academic advisors whose primary responsibility was advising students. Counselors and faculty advisors were not considered. Community colleges in Illinois were the only institutions considered for this study; therefore accessibility was limited in terms of the number of participants and institutions available for the researcher to interview. Although the researcher could have expanded the participant and institutional selection criteria, that did not prevent the researcher from obtaining data needed to conduct a thorough study.

Recommendations for Practice

It is the hope of the researcher that this study helps all involved in academic advising to better understand the impact that advising has on achieving the mission of the college. Academic advising has major implications for student success, retention, and graduation. Findings from the study provided a basis for the four recommendations.

First, even though most high-level community college administrators are not involved in the daily academic advising operations, it is vital that they understand how academic advising fulfills the mission of the college and support academic

advising efforts and initiatives. Therefore, it is important that administrators who are directly responsible for academic advising also have an understanding themselves of the importance of academic advising and be able to communicate that to higher-level administrators.

Second, it is important that the advising mission statement supports and aligns with the institutional mission; therefore, administrators directly responsible for academic advising should develop an advising mission statement for their department that directly reflects the institutional mission, vision, and purpose.

Third, it is essential that academic advisors stay abreast of academic policies on their campus and best practices in advising; therefore, administrators need to make sure that advisors are involved in frequent continued professional development opportunities whether they are provided by the administrator or through some outside entity, such as NACADA.

Fourth, because academic advising some times does not carry the professional status that is should and is not always well perceived on campus by faculty and higher-level administrators, academic advisors and administrators responsible for academic advising must engage in research that shows its value and benefit to students and the academic institution as a whole.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher has three recommendations for future research. First, academic advising is ultimately a relationship between the advisor and the student. Therefore, the student's perspective of how they perceive academic advising is important and should be

taken into consideration when designing future research in this area. Second, because this study heavily involves the roles of academic advisors, Role Theory can be used as the theoretical framework to ground similar future research. Role Theory permits analysis of organizational phenomena from either a structural or a process-oriented perspective. Stryker and Statham (1985) describe Role Theory as the study of the degree to which individual behavior, social interaction, and the social person are constrained by social structure with a focus on each person's role. Role Theory posits that human behavior is guided by expectations held by both the individual and by other people. Third, because of the limited number of participants and institutional participation, the researcher recommends more expansive selection criteria.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

PARTICIPANT

INFORMED CONSENT- PARTICIPANT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that will take place from September 2007 to June 2009. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Zalika Brown, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand that this study is entitled Synchronicity of the Community College Mission and the Roles and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors: Bridging the Gap. The purpose of the study is: to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors integrate with the mission of community colleges. In addition, the purpose of the study is: (1) to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice; and (2) to explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors.

I understand that my participation will consist of one interview lasting 1-2 hours in length with a possible second, follow-up interview lasting 1-2 hours in length. I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without prejudice until the completion of the dissertation.

I understand that only the researcher, Zalika Brown, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, taped recordings, and field notes from the interview(s) in which I participated.

I understand that the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, but my identity will in no way be revealed.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information, I may contact the researcher: Zalika Brown, 30 East Lake Street, Chicago, Illinois 60601, (312) 553-6023, Email address: zalika_brown@yahoo.com

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by me, you may contact my Dissertation Chair: Dr. Scipio A.J. Colin, III, National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60603, 312-621-9650, Ext. 3326; Email address: scolin@nl.edu and scipioc3@cs.com

Participant's Signature _____ Date

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PARTICIPANT- ACADEMIC ADVISORS

National-Louis University
Interview Guide: Academic Advisors

1. Does your college have a mission statement?

2. Do you see what you view as your roles and responsibilities as an academic advisor reflected in that mission statement?

2a. If yes, in what ways?

3. Do you believe the job functions you perform are critical to the success of your institution?

4. How do you think administrators perceive the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors?

4a. Do you believe administrators view your job functions as critical to the success of the college?

5. Is academic advising viewed by administrators as a vital function in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice?

6. Do you feel there is a need for continuing professional development opportunities for academic advisors?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PARTICIPANT - ADMINISTRATORS

National-Louis University
Interview Guide: Community College Administrators

1. Does your institutional mission guide the direction of the college?

2. How does academic advising integrate with the mission of the college?

3. What are the major job functions of academic advisors?

4. What are your views regarding the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors?

5. How do you feel academic advisors can assist in fulfilling the goals established by the mission of the college?

6. Has your institution undertaken professional development opportunities specifically for academic advisors?

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

FOCUS GROUP

INFORMED CONSENT- FOCUS GROUP

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Zalika Brown, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand that this study is entitled Synchronicity of the Community College Mission and the Roles and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors: Bridging the Gap. The purpose of the study is: to identify how the role and responsibilities of academic advisors integrate with the mission of community colleges. In addition, the purpose of the study is: (1) to explore how academic advisors play a vital role in retaining students until they have completed their program of choice; and (2) to explore how academic advising is viewed by community college administrators and academic advisors.

I understand my participation will consist of a focus group session lasting 1-2 hours. I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation. I understand my exposure is minimal to risk, no greater than that encountered in daily life.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential by the researcher coding the data and that my identity will neither be attached to the data I contributed, nor stored with other project data. Tapes, transcriptions and disks will be kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's domicile.

I understand that the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, but my identity will in no way be revealed.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information, I may contact the researcher: Zalika Brown, 30 East Lake Street, Chicago, Illinois 60601, (312) 553-6023, Email address: zalika_brown@yahoo.com

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by me, you may contact my Dissertation Chair: Dr. Scipio A.J. Colin, III, National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60603, 312-621-9650, Ext. 3326; Email address: scolin@nl.edu and scipioc3@cs.com

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

FOCUS GROUP

National-Louis University
Interview Guide: Focus Group/Academic Advisors

1. Does your role as an Academic Advisor contribute to accomplishing the mission of the college?

2. Do Academic Advisors assist in student retention and graduation rates?

3. Do you believe the job functions you perform are critical to the success of the institution?

4. Do you believe administrators view your job functions as critical to the success of the college?

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